

# JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

*Third Series*

EDITED BY  
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"EIGHT ONE-ACT PLAYS" ETC.



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## PREFACE

THIS book has been compiled in response to the ever-increasing demand for one-act plays of to-day suitable for junior reading and performance. Proceeding on the lines previously laid down in my first and second series, I have tried to select from authors who have proved acceptable to boys and girls of twelve to sixteen as wide a range as possible, excluding (to the best of my knowledge) material used in other anthologies.

Among these authors will be found several old friends whose work has already become familiar through the medium of *Junior One-Act Plays of To day*, while the majority of the remainder will be recognized as having achieved distinction elsewhere.

Chosen mainly for reading and acting in the form-room, the plays in the present volume will, I hope, be also found useful for public performance. Full particulars of the addresses from which permission for such performances must be sought preface each play.

For permission to reprint the plays grateful acknowledgment is due to the following—the respective authors or their representatives and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., for *The Reluctant Dragon*, *The Wanderer*, *The Second Best Bed*, *The Stranger*, and *The Boatswain's Mate*, Miss Ella Adkins, Mr J. C. Bayliss, and Messrs George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., for *The Bloater* and *The Golden Mean*, the respective authors or their representatives and Messrs Gowans and Gray, Ltd. for *Higgins*, *The Centre-forward*, *The Apple-tree*, and *Queer Street*.

A E M B

## INTRODUCTION

THIS volume will give you an opportunity of studying and acting plays which are much shorter and more modern than those of Shakespeare. You may have found it difficult to sustain interest in a five-act comedy such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, partly because it is rather complicated in structure and partly because you cannot read it in a single lesson. Then, again, a full length play has generally to be 'cut' a great deal before you are allowed to act it on the school stage.

It is possible, of course, to manufacture something short by adapting stories or episodes from Shakespeare, but the result is not nearly so satisfying as a complete one act play, which has a definite plan and unity of its own.

Now, the short play, like the short story, is a special form of art, and as such requires a special technique on the part of the author. For this reason it should be studied for its own sake, and not merely as an approach to the study of full length drama. You will find, as a rule, that a one-act play is made to turn upon a single idea or situation, and that in working this out in dramatic form the author has a single end in view.

The essence of all drama is *conflict*. Though the playwright's purpose may vary from time to time, he relies upon some sort of conflict in developing his theme. In stories of adventure you have noticed that the hero is made to struggle against odds, and whether he succeeds and lives 'happily ever after,' or fails gloriously, and so wins your sympathy and admiration, you are interested in the 'conflict' which helps to determine his character. The same thing happens in a play. Sometimes this conflict

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## 10 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO DAY

to one of wills. Then (as you will see from the examples in this book) it is one of wills. When there is a struggle between the forces within a man there is and we have also an inner conflict. In any case the dark powers of lust, anger and the sequel of vice & evil prevail on natural lines so that in the struggle of wills the bad tendencies occur. This does not mean that the author has no purpose in his play. On the contrary the object of the play like that of science is to find out what is most powerful and in securing the main effect. It does not, however, mean that no natural development of a situation is possible unless the various characters behave consistently with what we are led to expect of them from the means of ingenuity at our disposal. The consistency is really what is often referred to as the unity of action.

The structure of the drama is in an interesting study in itself and your appreciation of a play will depend at least in part on your knowledge of the way in which the author goes to work. In the one act play where a single dramatic situation is dealt with the principle of economy is all important. There is no time for digressions. The author has to capture the interest of the audience at the outset, and then take care to retain it to the end.

The following scheme has been generally adopted to illustrate dramatic structure.

1 *Exposition* Here the situation is explained and the characters introduced. Important events may have happened before the rise of the curtain. These are made known to the reader or audience in various ways which should be studied in different types of play.

2 *Complication* Here interest is increased by the introduction of fresh factors which complicate the situation and delay the solution. This is the stage when difficulties and awkward developments arise.

3  *Climax* This is the highest point of interest. The

conflict has come to a crisis, and awakes intense feeling. This stage either immediately precedes or coincides with

4 The *dénouement*, or final unravelling of the plot. This may be called the dramatic solution of the problem created by the situation.

Beginnings and endings are highly important. Just as a short story writer often plunges directly into his theme, so the playwright often takes a neat dive into the middle of a situation. Nevertheless the audience must be prepared in some way for what they see and hear when the curtain rises. How is this done? By a prologue, by stage directions, or perhaps by the opening speeches? These are questions which you can tackle satisfactorily for yourselves, and so increase your knowledge of technique. Endings, too, vary enormously. In considering different ways of working out a *dénouement* you will realize that some authors leave you with a problem to solve—in other words, the sequel is left to your own imagination. At other times there is a greater sense of finality, the situation is rounded off, and you are provided with a useful opportunity of discussing the methods adopted to secure an effective 'curtain'.

In the one-act play the climax and the *dénouement* often occur simultaneously and immediately precede an exciting 'curtain'. This is especially likely to happen in the modern thriller, where the audience is kept in suspense till the last possible moment.

The playwright has a purpose, try to discover it. Is he merely trying to tell an interesting story? Is he poking fun at a certain type of people or a certain state of affairs? Or is he chiefly concerned in showing you critical points in the development of character? It is possible to achieve more than one aim in writing a good play.

To be able to appreciate drama fully, however, you must go further. As in a story the subject matter counts a great deal, but there are other points that also deserve

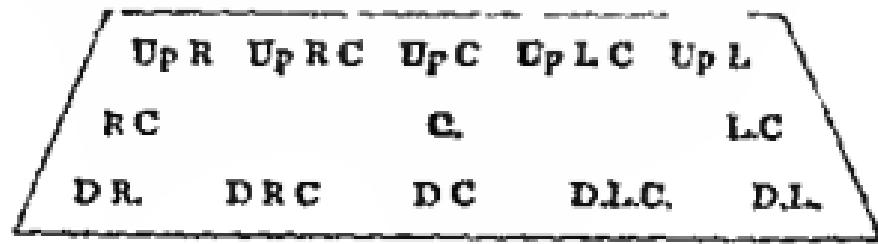
## 12 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

consideration. These are more especially connected with character and dialogue. Ask yourselves whether the author relies for effect more on what his characters say or on what they do. Which of them arouse in you the most feeling? Is this feeling one of sympathy or dislike or amusement or admiration? Does it increase as the play proceeds? Sometimes the plot instead of 'thickening' seems to 'hang fire.' There is a loss of interest somewhere. You should notice at what points (if at all) that happens. Ask too whether your liking for any particular play depends on a special knowledge of the type of people or events portrayed. Is the subject 'topical' or is it likely to have a permanent appeal?

Now about acting. The following notes are intended to help those of you who have little or no previous stage experience, but at the same time they may prove useful to you even if you are simply reading a play aloud in the classroom. The latter exercise, properly done, should always prove valuable as a preparation for the more difficult (and enjoyable) enterprise of public performance.

*Stage Directions.* These are indicated at the beginning of each scene and also in the text. It is a good plan to underline them in red ink before rehearsing. The directions R. and L. mean right and left of the performers not of the audience. 'Up' refers to the back of the stage 'Down' to the front near the footlights.

The abbreviations relating to these and various other positions are illustrated in the following diagram.



Footlights

*Entrances* To secure an effective entrance the actor must time it properly—*i.e.*, he must decide beforehand whether he is to appear on the stage immediately the cue is given, or whether he is to leave a pause. The manner of his entrance is also important. A good rule is to 'put oneself into the part' several moments beforehand, so as to obtain greater naturalness and freedom. Care must also be taken to face the audience as much as possible when entering.

*Grouping* When a scene is in progress the character who is the centre of interest should dominate the stage. For this purpose he must be perfectly visible to the audience, and the rest of the actors should be grouped on one or both sides of him according to circumstances. This grouping is generally indicated in the stage directions, but a certain amount is left to the discretion of the performers themselves. Team play is essential to secure freedom of action for the predominant figure (or figures), who must be given the right of way and not be embarrassed by the crowding in of the other characters.

*Speech, Gesture, and Movement* All three should be as natural as possible and suited to the part. It is unnecessary to shout to be heard at the back of the hall. To be audible the speaker must learn to *direct* his voice—*i.e.*, he must avoid turning his head too far to the right or left, or addressing his boots. The value of pauses is often forgotten. A great deal of dramatic effect may be lost by an actor who is afraid to pause lest the audience should accuse him of having forgotten his words. During laughter or applause the speaker should wait for silence before proceeding, otherwise important lines may be lost. The wait can always be covered by suitable action.

*Gesture* is often a stumbling-block to beginners, who never know what to do with their hands, and are apt to use awkward mannerisms. It is a good plan to practise

# THE RELUCTANT DRAGON

*By HARCOURT WILLIAMS*

*Arranged from Kenneth Grahame's story*

## CHARACTERS

THE BOY

HIS MOTHER

HIS FATHER, *a shepherd*

THE DRAGON

ST GEORGE

VILLAGERS

# THE RELUCTANT DRAGON<sup>1</sup>

## SCENE I

SCENE *The cottage* *The furniture should be simple* The MOTHER is sitting c, facing the footlights, from which a red glow suggests a fire. *The boy sits on a stool to her right* He is reading from a large book. *There is an armchair on the MOTHER'S left* On R, behind the BOY, is a small table, on which is the BOY's muffler

BOY [reading aloud] "Dragon! Dragon! If you are not a coward come out and fight with me!" And the dragon answered, 'I'm waiting for you O Prince,' and the next minute he reared himself out of the water, huge and horrible to see. And the prince sprang to meet him, and they fought till it was noon" [A heavy door slams

FATHER [off stage] Maria! Maria! [His FATHER enters L, with a lantern, which he puts down, and then throws himself into the vacant chair] It's all up with me, Maria! Never no more can I go up on them there downs, was it ever so!

MOTHER Now don't take on like that, but tell us all about it first, whatever it is 'as given you this shake up, and then me and you and the son here, between us, we ought to be able to get to the bottom of it.

FATHER It began nights ago You know that cave up there—I never liked it, somehow, and the sheep never liked it, neither, and when sheep don't like a thing there's

<sup>1</sup> Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street Strand, London W.C.2 or 25 West 45th Street, New York

## 18 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

generally some reason for it. Well, for some time past there's been faint noises coming from the cave—noises like heavy sighings, with grunts mixed up in them, and sometimes a snoring. Far away down—real snoring, yet somehow not honest snoring, like you and me o' nights, you know!

BOT *I know*

FATHER. Of course, I was terrible frightened, yet somehow I couldn't keep away. So this *every evening*, before I come down, I took a look round by the cave, quietly. And there—oh, Lord!—there I saw him at last, as plain as I see you!

MOTHER. Saw who?

FATHER. Why, him, I'm a telling you! He was sticking half way out of the cave, and seemed to be enjoying of the cool of the evening in a poetical sort of way. He was as big as a cart horse and all covered with shiny scales. He had his chin on his paws, and I should say he was meditating about things. Oh, yes a peaceable sort o' beast enough, and not ramping or carrying on or doing anything but what was right and proper. I admit all that. And yet what am I to do? Scales, you know, and claws, and a tail for certain, though I didn't see that end of him. I ain't used to 'em, and I don't hold with 'em, and that's a fact!

BOT It's all right, Father. Don't you worry. It's only a dragon.

FATHER. Only a dragon? What do you mean, sitting there, you and your dragons? Only a dragon, indeed? And what do you know about it?

BOT *[rushing, putting his book on the stool he has vacated, and warming his hands at firelight]* Cos it is, and 'cos I do know. Look here, Father, you know we've each of us got our line. You know about sheep and weather and things, I know about dragons. I always said, you know,

that that cave up there was a dragon-cave I always said it must have belonged to a dragon some time, and ought to belong to a dragon now, if rules count for anything Well, now you tell me it *has* got a dragon, and so *that's* all right Rules always come right if you wait quietly Now, please just leave this all to me

MOTHER [taking *her basket* to table, R] He's quite right, Father As be says, dragons is his line, and not ours

BOY [crossing L] Look here, I'll go up and have a talk with him

FATHER But you can't do that Why, we don't know him He mayn't be respectable like

MOTHER [down R] Well, if he ain't our boy'll find out quick enough He's wonderful knowing about book beasts, as every one allows And, to tell the truth, I'm not half happy in my mind, thinking of that poor animal lying alone up there, without a bit o' hot supper and no one to mend his socks

FATHER Hadn't I better go with the boy?

BOY [picking up *lantern*, which FATHER has left near L entrance] Now, Father, please don't come worrying around You don't understand dragons a bit, and they're very sensitive, you know

FATHER [going up C entrance] I don't want to go I'd sooner bide along o' Maria I tell ye I don't *hold* with dragons [Goes off

MOTHER You'd best put on your muffler, and mind you're back by nine o'clock

BOY Right you are, Mother Everything will be all right You see!

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BOY Right you are, Mother Everything will be all right. You see!

10 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SCENE II

SCENE: *The cave. A low bank juts out from the cave from L. to C. On this the DRAGON is lying, with closed eyes. The BOY enters R.*

BOY. Hullo, Dragon!

DRAGON *[opening his eyes].* Now don't you hit me, or bung stones, or squirt water, or anything. I won't have it, I tell you!

BOY Not goin' to hit you, and don't for goodness' sake keep on saying "Don't" I hear so much of it. I've simply looked in to ask you how you were and all that sort of thing, but if I'm in the way I can easily clear out. I've lots of friends, and no one can say I'm in the habit of shoving myself in where I'm not wanted!

DRAGON. No, no, don't go off in a huff. Fact is, I'm as happy up here as the day's long. Never without an occupation, dear fellow, never without an occupation! And yet, between ourselves, it is a trifle dull at times.

BOY *[sitting on the ground].* Going to make a long stay here?

DRAGON. Can't hardly say at present. It seems a nice enough place—but I've only been here a short time, and one must look about and reflect and consider before settling down. It's rather a serious thing, settling down. Besides, I'm such a confoundedly lazy beggar!

BOY. You surprise me.

DRAGON. It's the sad truth, and I fancy that's really how I came to be here. You see, all the other fellows were so earnest and all that sort of thing—always rampaging and chasing knights and devouring damsels—whereas I liked to get my meals regular, and then to prop my back against a bit of rock and snooze a bit, and wake up and think of things going on and how they kept going on

just the same, you know So when it happened I got fairly caught.

BOY When *what* happened?

DRAGON That's just what I don't precisely know I suppose the earth sneezed, or something Anyhow, there was a roar and a general stramash, and I found myself miles away underground, and wedged in as tight as tight.

BOY I say!

DRAGON Thank goodness my wants were few, and at any rate I had peace and quietness, and wasn't always being asked to come along and do something

BOY I know

DRAGON And I've got such an active mind—always occupied, I assure you But at last I began to think it would be fun to know what you other fellows were doing So I scratched and worked this way and that, and at last I came out through this cave here And I like the view and the people—what I've seen of 'em—and on the whole I feel inclined to settle down here

BOY What's your mind occupied about?

DRAGON Did you ever—just for fun—try to make up poetry—verses, you know?

BOY Course I have. Heaps of it And some of it's quite good, I feel sure, only there's no one here cares about it. Mother's a very kind and all that when I read it to her, and so's Father, for that matter But somehow they don't seem to—

DRAGON Exactly! My own case exactly! They don't seem to, and you can't argue with 'em about it. Now you've got culture, you have, and I should just like your candid opinion about some little things I threw off lightly when I was down there I'm awfully pleased to have met you, and I'm hoping the other neighbours will be equally agreeable There was a very nice old gentle-

man up here this evening, but he didn't seem to want to intrude

BOY That was my father, and he *is* a nice old gentleman, and I'll introduce you some day, if you like

DRAGON Can't you come up here and dine or something to-morrow? Only, of course, if you've got nothing better to do

BOY Thanks awfully, but we don't go out anywhere without my mother, and, to tell you the truth, I'm afraid she mightn't quite approve of you. You see, there's no getting over the hard fact that you're a dragon, is there? And when you talk of settling down, and the neighbours, and so on I can't help feeling that you don't quite realize your position. You're an enemy of the human race, you see!

DRAGON Haven't got an enemy in the world. Too lazy to make 'em, to begin with. And if I do read other fellows' poetry I'm always ready to listen to theirs!

BOY Oh, dear! I wish you'd try and grasp the situation properly. When the other people find you out they'll come after you with spears and swords and all sorts of things. You'll have to be exterminated, according to their way of looking at it.

DRAGON Exterminated?

BOY You're a scourge, and a pest, and a baneful monster!

DRAGON Not a word of truth in it. Character'll bear the strictest investigation. And now there's a little poem of mine I was working on when you appeared on the scene—

BOY Oh, if you won't be sensible I'm going off home

DRAGON It's quite a short poem. It's about a daisy

BOY No, I can't stop to hear any poetry. I promised my mother I would be home by nine o'clock

DRAGON Some other time, maybe?

BOY I'll look you up to-morrow, and do for goodness' sake try and realize that you're a pestilential scourge, or you'll find yourself in a most awful fix

DRAGON I'll do my best

BOY Good night

DRAGON So pleased to have met you Good night  
[The BOY goes out, R] Charming boy!

CURTAIN

### SCENE III

SCENE: *The same. A few weeks later. The DRAGON has changed his position. He is now facing towards the cave, and, using the low bank as a desk, is writing poetry.*

*The church bells are pealing. Distant shouts can be heard*  
 "Long live St George!" "Cheers for St George!"  
 "St George to the rescue!"

BOY [running in, rather breathlessly] It's all up, Dragon! He's coming! He's here now! You'll have to pull yourself together and do something at last!

DRAGON Don't be violent, boy. Sit down and get your breath, and try and remember that the noun governs the verb, and then perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me who's coming

BOY That's right, take it coolly. Hope you'll be half as cool when I've got through with my news. It's only St George who's coming, that's all

DRAGON St George!

BOY Yes I thought at first it was the circus. He rode into the village just now. Of course, you can lick him—a great big fellow like you! But I thought I'd warn

man up here this evening, but he didn't seem to want to intrude

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### SCENE III

SCENE. The same. *A few weeks later. The DRAGON has changed his position. He is now facing towards the east, and, using the low bank as a desk, is writing poetry.*

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14 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

you, 'cos he's got the longest, wickedest-looking spear you ever did see !

DRAGON Oh, deary, deary me this is too awful ! I won't see him, and that's flat I don't want to know the fellow at all I'm sure he's not nice. You must tell him to go away at once please Say he can write if he likes but I can't give him an interview I'm not seeing anybody at present.

BOY Now Dragon, Dragon, don't be wrongheaded ! You've got to fig' t hup some time or other

DRAGON Why ?

BOY Cos he's St George and you're the dragon. Better get it over

DRAGON Just understand, once and for all, that I can't fight and I won't fight ! I've never fought in my life, and I'm not going to begin now In the old days I always let the *earnerest* fellows do all the fighting, and that's why I have the pleasure of being here now

BOY But if you don't fight he'll cut your head off !

DRAGON Oh I think not You'll be able to arrange something I've every confidence in you you're such a manager Just run down, there's a dear chap, and make it all right I leave it entirely to you

BOY Arrange things, indeed ! You treat the whole affair as if it were an invitation to tea and croquet.

DRAGON I don't care very much for croquet, do you ? Rather a quarrelsome game, don't you think ?

BOY Dragon, you're impossible !

DRAGON Ah, here's your dear mother coming up to see me [Waves a paw] Coo-ee !

MOTHER [off stage] Coo-ee ! [She enters, carrying a large basket] Good morning, master

DRAGON Good morning, ma'am.

MOTHER I've brought your mending back, and here's a little drop of hot soup I thought it might do you good.

DRAGON That's very thoughtful of you ma'am

MOTHER And here are a few rags and some metal polish I thought we might try and get some of that nasty rust off your scales

BOY Well, as you two are going to be busy I'll just run down and see if I can get a word with St George

DRAGON That's a good idea

BOY And, remember, you're not to go all sleepy again

DRAGON I'm wide awake, young man I thank you

[*The boy goes out*

MOTHER Now, which end shall we start on?

DRAGON Well there's this bit under my chin I find it rather difficult not to drop things occasionally

MOTHER You ought to wear a bib young man, that you ought. That reminds me you'd better have your soup while it's hot. [*She pins a napkin under his chin, and begins to spoon the soup into his mouth*] Oh, lawks, we'll be all night thus way, and I've my washung to fetch in Here goes

[*She pours it straight from the jar down his throat*

DRAGON I must say the soup was delicious

MOTHER Now let's get to work

DRAGON May I meanwhile read you my latest little poem?

MOTHER Surely That won't hinder me

DRAGON

" Come into the meadows  
Where the lambkins play,  
All among the daisies,  
Through the summer day ! "

I'm afraid that's all I've written so far

MOTHER It's a fair masterpiece

## SCENE IV

SCENE The inn A table, c., with a chair on each side  
 ST GEORGE is seated in, quaffing a pot of ale. He is  
 trolling some mutable air. There is a knock at the  
 door

BOY [outside] May I come in?

ST GEORGE Come in

[The boy enters L.]

BOY St George, I want to talk to you about this little  
 matter of the dragon, if you're not tired of it by this time

ST GEORGE Another tale of misery and wrong? Is it a  
 kind parent of whom the tyrant has bereft you? Or some  
 tender sister or brother? Well, it shall soon be avenged

BOY Nothing of the sort. There's a misunderstanding  
 somewhere, and I want to put it right. The fact is, this  
 is a good dragon.

ST GEORGE Exactly I quite understand a good dragon.  
 Believe me, I do not in the least regret that he is an  
 adversary worthy of my steel, and no feeble specimen of  
 his noxious tribe.

BOY But he's not a noxious tribe. Oh, dear, oh,  
 dear, how stupid men are when they get an idea into  
 their heads! I tell you he's a good dragon, and a friend  
 of mine, and tells me the most beautiful stories you ever  
 heard, all about old times and when he was little. And  
 he's been so kind to Mother, and Mother'd do anything  
 for him. And Father likes him too, though Father  
 always falls asleep when the dragon starts talking about  
 poetry and style. But the fact is, nobody can help liking  
 him when once they know him. He's so engaging and so  
 trustful, and as simple as a child!

ST GEORGE Sit down and draw your chair up. I like  
 a fellow who sticks up for his friends, and I'm sure the  
 dragon has his good points if he's got a friend like you

But that's not the question All this evening I've been listening, with grief and anguish unspeakable, to tales of murder, theft, and wrong, rather too highly coloured, perhaps, not always quite convincing, but forming in the main a most serious roll of crime

BOY Oh, you've been taking in all the yarns our villagers have been telling you Why, they're the biggest story-tellers in all the country round It's a known fact All they want is a fight They're the most awful beggars for getting up fights—dogs, bulls, badgers, dragons—anything as long as it's a fight And I've no doubt they've been telling you what a hero you were, and how you were bound to win in the cause of right and justice, and so on, but, let me tell you, as I came down the street just now they were betting six to four on the dragon!

ST GEORGE Six to four on the dragon! This is an evil world, and sometimes I fear that all the wickedness in it is not entirely bottled up inside dragons And yet, may not this wily beast have misled you? May there not be, at this very moment, some hapless princess immured within yonder gloomy cavern?

BOY [distressed] I assure you, St George, there's nothing of that sort in the cave at all The dragon's a real gentleman, every inch of him

ST GEORGE Well, perhaps I've misjudged the animal But what are we to do? Here are the dragon and I supposed to be thirsting for each other's blood I don't see any way out of it exactly Can't you arrange things somehow?

BOY Really, the way you two seem to leave everything to me!

ST GEORGE Well, what do you suggest?

BOY Couldn't you go away quietly?

ST GEORGE Impossible! Quite against the rules You know that as well as I do

## 28 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BOT Well, then, look here, would you mind strolling up with me and seeing the dragon and talking it over?

ST GEORGE Well, it's *irregular*, but really it seems about the most sensible thing to do. But cheer up! Perhaps there won't have to be any fight after all.

[ST GEORGE strides to the door

BOT Oh, but I hope there will, though! Hi, St George, wait for me!

CURTAIN

### SCENE V

SCENE The *cave*. The DRAGON is seated C., immersed in a large book. The BOT and ST GEORGE enter R.

BOT Dragon! [The DRAGON does not hear.] I expect he's occupying his mind. Dragon, I've brought a friend to see you.

DRAGON Oh, this is delightful!

BOT This is St George. St George, let me introduce you to the dragon.

DRAGON So glad to meet you, St George. Charming weather we are having. Now, pray make yourselves at home. Do sit down.

[ST GEORGE sits R., BOT L., DRAGON C.]

BOT We've come up to talk things over quietly, Dragon, and now for goodness' sake do let's have a little straight common sense and come to some practical, businesslike arrangement.

ST GEORGE Now, don't you think that, after all, the simplest plan would be just to fight it out, according to the rules, and let the best man win?

BOT Oh, yes, do, Dragon! It'll save such a lot of bother.

DRAGON My young friend, you shut up. Believe me,

St George, there's nobody in the world I'd sooner oblige than you and this young gentleman here. But the whole thing is nonsense, and conventionality, and popular thick-headedness. There's absolutely nothing to fight about, and I'm not going to, so that settles it!

ST GEORGE. But supposing I make you?

DRAGON. You can't. I should only go into my cave and retire for a time down the hole I came up. You'd soon get heartily sick of waiting for me.

ST GEORGE. But this would be a beautiful place for a fight. Think what a picture it would make myself on the hill top in my golden armour and you below, ramping and breathing fire!

DRAGON. Now you're trying to get at me through my artistic sensibilities, but it won't work. Not but what it would make a very pretty picture, as you say.

BOY. Now we're getting to business.

ST GEORGE. It might be arranged. I must spear you somewhere, of course, but I'm not bound to hurt you very much. There's such a lot of you that there must be a few *spare* places somewhere—here, for instance—

DRAGON [wriggling coyly]. You're tickling, George. Stop it, I tell you! That place won't do at all. If I laughed it would spoil everything.

ST GEORGE. What about under your neck? If I speared you in all these folds of thick skin you'd never know I'd done it.

DRAGON. Yes, but are you sure you can hit the right place?

ST GEORGE. Of course I am. You leave that to me.

DRAGON. It's just because I've got to leave it to you that I'm asking. No doubt you would deeply regret any error you might make in the hurry of the moment; but you wouldn't regret it half as much as I should!

BOY But look here, Dragon, I'm worried about some thing. There's to be a fight, and you're to be licked. What I want to know is, where do you come in?

DRAGON St George, just tell him, please, what will happen to me after I'm vanquished in the deadly combat?

ST GEORGE According to the rules, first I shall lead you in triumph down to the market place, and then I shall tell them that you've seen the error of your ways—

DRAGON Precisely, and then?

ST GEORGE Oh, and then there will be the usual banquet.

DRAGON Exactly, the usual banquet, and that's where I come in. I'm going into Society [He waltzes a step or two]. You'll find I have all the qualities to endear me to people who give parties.

ST GEORGE Remember, you'll have to do your proper share of the fighting, Dragon! I mean, ramping and breathing fire, and so on.

DRAGON I can ramp all right; as to breathing fire, I may be a little out of practice, but I'll do the best I can. So now that's all settled, and if you don't mind—I'm an old fashioned fellow—don't want to turn you out, but it's getting near my bed-time.

ST GEORGE Oh, quite! Good night, Dragon.

DRAGON Good night, St George. Good night, boy.

[ST GEORGE and BOY shake hands with DRAGON, and cross R.

ST GEORGE [turning back] I knew I had forgotten something. There ought to be a princess. Terror-stricken and chained to a rock, and all that sort of thing.

DRAGON Surely, boy, you could arrange a princess?

BOY No, I can't at this time of night. I'm tired to death of arranging things. Do stop asking me to arrange anything more until to-morrow.

DRAGON That's all right. Run along home Good night Remember me to your mother

[ST GEORGE and BOY go off R

[*The DRAGON dances gaily up stage to the strains of "The Blue Danube"*

CURTAIN

[*The BOY comes in front of the curtain and addresses the audience*

BOY Will you, please, now imagine that you have walked up to the top of the downs with luncheon-baskets to see the great fight ? You have all chosen good places, and if the combat proves too terrifying you can all make a speedy retreat through the emergency exits ! [A trumpet sounds] Hark ! St George approaches ! Please give him a rousing welcome

SCENE VI

SCENE : *The down* The curtain rises to the strains of "The Conquering Hero" All the 'village' is gathered in a semicircle

Enter ST GEORGE. He is greeted by loud cheers

ST GEORGE [to the BOY] Where is the dragon ? Late, as usual

BOY He's probably a little nervous--first public appearance, you know, and all that

ST GEORGE Do you think he has changed his mind ? He may vote the whole performance rot

BOY Oh, he wouldn't do a thing like that [Calling] Now, then, Dragon !

[*Mutterings and snorts, rumblings, smoke, and then enter the DRAGON He has got himself up magni*

*sicently He strikes an attitude, c., and spits fire*

CROWD Oooooo-oo-oo !

BOY Oh, well done Dragon ! I didn't think you had it in you

FATHER Now, then ! One to be ready, two to be steady—go !

[ST GEORGE charges. The DRAGON ruffs him playfully and sends him staggering. Laughter from crowd. ST GEORGE charges again. The DRAGON butts him with his snout. Renewed laughter. ST GEORGE charges again. The DRAGON side steps.]

CROWD Missed ! [A whistle is blown]

FATHER That be end of first round.

BOY You did manage it well !

ST GEORGE What an actor your dragon friend is !

[The DRAGON ramp about the stage and roars at the VILLAGERS, who hide in terror]

BOY What's the old fool up to now ?

ST GEORGE He's giving an exhibition of ramping

FATHER [blowing whistle] Time !

[Another whistle, and then the DRAGON puts his tail between ST GEORGE's legs, and the latter falls. The whistle blows]

BOY It is a jolly fight, St George !

ST GEORGE [picking himself up] Oh, is it ?

BOY Could you let it last a bit longer ?

ST GEORGE No. Your simple minded friend is getting conceited with all this cheering. He's playing the fool and forgetting all about the arrangement. I'll finish him off this round.

BOY Now, Saint, please don't get too excited

ST GEORGE Don't be afraid. I've marked the spot exactly, and he's sure to help me because it is his only chance of being asked to the banquet.

[*The DRAGON, who has been listening from behind, playfully takes ST GEORGE's hand between his teeth, which 'goes very well' with the crowd*

FATHER [blowing whistle] Now, then! Time, gentlemen, please!

[*After a skirmish ST GEORGE pins the DRAGON to the ground with his spear*

BOY. Cheers for St George!

CROWD Hip, hip, hurrah!

BOY [sotto voce] All right, Dragon, old boy?

DRAGON [winking one eye] All correct

FATHER Bain't you goin' to cut his 'ead off, master?

ST GEORGE [startled] Eh?

FATHER Bain't you goin' to cut his 'ead off, my dear?

ST GEORGE Well, not to-day, I think. That can be done at any time. Let us all go down to the village first and have some refreshment, and then I'll give him a good talking to, and you'll find he'll be a very different dragon.

[Renewed cheers. The MOTHER throws a large wreath to ST GEORGE. "The Conquering Hero" is struck up, and a procession is formed as the curtain falls]

## SCENE VII

SCENE. Outside the inn. It is a moonlight night. Merry-makers within are singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow."

Enter the DRAGON, L., dancing a little to the tune. He is followed by the BOY

DRAGON Jolly night it's been. Jolly banquet. Jolly stars. Jolly little inn, this. I think I shall stop here.

## 34 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Don't feel like climbing up any beastly hill. Boy's promised to see me home. Boy had better do it, then. No responsibility on my part. Responsibility all boy's

*[He lies in slumber]*

BOY Oh, get up, Dragon! You know my mother's sitting up, and I'm so tired, and you made me promise to see you home, and I never knew what it meant, or I wouldn't have done it

*[He breaks down]*

*[Enter ST GEORGE, L.]*

ST GEORGE. What's the matter, boy?

BOY. Oh, it's this great lumbering pig of a dragon! First he makes me promise to see him home, and then he says I'd better do it, and goes to sleep! Might as well try to see a haystack home!

ST GEORGE. Now don't take on. I'll stand by you, and we'll both see him home. Wake up, Dragon!

BOY Wake up, Dragon!

BOY Wake up, Dragon!

DRAGON. What a night, George! What a—

ST GEORGE. Now look here, Dragon. Here's this boy waiting to see you home, and you know he ought to have been in bed these two hours, and what his mother'll say I don't know, and anybody but a selfish pig would have made him go to bed long ago—

DRAGON. And he shall go to bed! Poor little chap, only fancy his being up at this hour! It's a shame, that's what it is, and I don't think, St George, you've been very considerate. But come along at once, and don't let us have any more arguing or sulky shillying. You give me a hold of your hand, boy—thank you, George, an arm up the hill is just what I wanted.

*[They turn their backs on the audience and move slowly up until they are silhouettes against the moonlit sky. They sing]*

" Then St George—'e made rev'rence—in the stable  
so dim,  
'Oo vanquished the dragon—so fearful and grim  
So-o grim—and so o fierce—that now we may say,  
All peaceful is our wakin' on Chri-istmas Day ! "

CURTAIN

## THE BLOATERS

By ELLA ADKINS

## CHARACTERS

## Mrs BROWN

BILL

RENT

RENÉ  
EMILY

Ents.  
George

GEORGE J.  
Mrs. Muggins

1945-2  
Rose

ROSE  
DARWYN

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## THE BLOATERS<sup>1</sup>

SCENE. MRS BROWN's sitting room

*The room is decidedly of the lodging-house type. The furniture is poor and the carpet well worn, but every effort has been made to camouflage these defects.*

Sideboard up L C Tea table and chairs D L C Settee D R C  
Armchair D L Piano and stool D R Door up L  
Door up R

*At the rise of the curtain MRS BROWN is discovered preparing tea. EMILY is carefully arranging six chairs round the table. BILL sits in an armchair, reading a paper.*

EMILY Oh, Ma, you 'ave made the table look lovely ! It looks as though we were going to 'ave a party.

MRS BROWN [sighing, as though very tired] Ah, well ! I suppose she'll be here any minute [Critically surveying table] Now, I wonder if there'll be enough of everything ? [Going up L C and getting purse from sideboard] Here, Emmy, p'raps you'd better run down to the corner and get another jar of lobster paste

[Exit EMILY L.

BILL [throwing down newspaper and looking at table] Crikey ! Is she going to eat up all that lot ?

MRS BROWN [coming D L] Now, then, Bill, don't throw your rubbish all over the room [Looking at him critically] Here, put your head up Have you washed your ears, as I told you ?

<sup>1</sup> Requests for permission to perform this play should be sent to Messrs George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 182 High Holborn London, W C 1, who will be prepared in approved cases to allow amateur societies to perform it without fee.

40 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BILL Well, Ma, I—I washed the one what'll be next to 'er

MRS BROWN [looking at BILL's hands] I thought so  
Your hands are filthy Go and wash them at once!

BILL Oh, what d'you want to make all this fuss for—  
just because one of Rene's stuck up school friends is  
coming to tea?

MRS BROWN Go along, Bill, and do as you're told.  
This young lady that's coming to tea with Rene is used  
to high Society manners D you want to make your own  
sister ashamed of her relations?

BILL [rushing] Oh, all right! [Looking at his hands]  
But I tell you I ave washed em once

MRS BROWN They don't look as though they'd been  
washed for a week.

BILL [crossing room] All right, then, if you don't  
believe me just you go and 'ave a look at the towel!

[Exit BILL R.]

(MRS BROWN examines chairs at tea table One is  
damaged, so she carefully changes its place

[Knock at door

MRS BROWN Come in!

[Enter MRS MUGGINS L. She is a pleasant, cheerful  
woman of a decidedly homely type, and enters  
carrying a large covered dish]

MRS BROWN [crossing L.] Oh it's Mrs Muggins!  
How are you? Are you coming inside?

MRS MUGGINS [coming D.L.C. above table] No, dearie  
I can't stop more than a minute I've got to git the old  
man's tea ready But, you see, my brother Joe—you've  
'eard me speak of my brother Joe— [Looking round  
room] Well, now, don't everythin' look a treat in 'ere!  
I 'eard that your Rene's expectin' smart company to tea.  
Is that right?

MRS BROWN [up L.] Yes, that's quite right. She,

invited a young lady from her boarding school to tea, so naturally I want to make everything look nice and cosy

MRS MUGGINS [*glancing about*] Cosy? Why, love a duck, I ain't seen the place look so smart and festive since young Georgie was christened! Why, anyone'd think, from the spread, that there was goin' to be a weddin', or a funeral, or somethin'! Mrs Brown, you know, the things you do for that girl of yours Well, I only 'ope she appreciates it!

MRS BROWN Oh, Rene's a good girl, and some day, if my dreams come true, she'll be a fine lady Ever since her aunt offered to pay for her schooling I've had great ambitions for Rene You know, Rotingrange is a fine school, and she's making some very rich friends there There's no knowing what it may mean when Rene gets a little older

MRS MUGGINS H'm! A rich 'usband, I suppose—or else she'll be secretary to one of these 'ere Cabinet Ministers Oh, well, [*going up to*] I 'ope she'll remember what you've done for 'er [*Turning at door*] Why, there, now! If I weren't going away without tellin' you what I *came* for! My brother Joe—'im what's in the fish-shop at Camden Town—'as just sent me a box of bloaters [*removes cover from dish and displays six large bloaters*], so I thought p'raps you'd like a few for your tea, seein' as you're all so fond of 'em

MRS BROWN [*reluctantly taking dish of bloaters, and not wishing to offend MRS MUGGINS*] Oh, thank you! This is ever so kind of you Please thank your brother for me

MRS MUGGINS Oh, Joe's a good sort! You know, 'e sends me lots of little presents in the fish line Last week it was a basket of shrimps, and as for whelks and cockles Why, bless you, it ain't no treat for me to go to Southend!

{Enter RENE R. *She is smartly—perhaps a trifle too smartly—dressed*

RENE [crossing C]. Is tea ready, Mother? Daphne should be here any minute now [Suddenly noticing the blotters] Why, Mother, what on earth are you doing with those?

MRS BROWN [embarrassed] Mrs Muggins has just brought them up for us Isn't it good of her?

MRS MUGGINS That's quite all right, Rene. You see, my brother Joe—you've 'eard me speak of my brother Joe, 'aven't you? You know, 'im what's in the fish-shop at Camden Town—well, 'e sent me more than I wanted [Looking RENE up and down] My, 'ow smart you look this afternoon! That dress do suit you a treat, dearie. Oh, well, I must be trottin', or the old man won't 'ave no tea [To MRS BROWN] Bye-bye—and mind, if you runs short of milk or anythin', like the old girl upstairs did last week, all you need to do is to knock the floor. Just give two 'ard bangs with your foot, then I shall 'ear you, and I'll be up at once. Bye bye [Exit MRS MUGGINS L.]

RENE [in great disgust] Mother, that awful woman is going to spoil everything!

MRS BROWN Rene, you mustn't speak of Mrs Muggins like that. It was very kind of her to bring us the blotters.

RENE But—she's so terribly common, and Daphne's used to smart people. [Coming D R C and sitting R. of settee] Oh, Mother, I've had such good times with Daphne; I'd simply hate her to despise me

MRS BROWN [setting dish of blotters on table and crossing R C to RENE] My dear little girl, no one shall ever despise you [Sits L. of settee]

RENE [almost in tears] Daphne has asked me to spend a week at her home next Easter, but I'm afraid that if she finds out how poor we are she'll want no more to do with me. You see, the girls at Rodingrange aren't like our

friends here in Fuller Street. They're all of them well off, and, not wanting to be looked down on, I pretended to be well off too.

BILL [entering R] Oh, you did, did you? [Coming R C] I suppose you told 'em all we lived in Buckingham Palace, and promised to give their kind regards to 'is Royal 'Ighness next time you meet 'im.

RENE Oh, shut up, Bill! And if you *must* talk, do try to sound your *h*'s.

BILL All right! Keep your 'air on [Striking an attitude] I'll tell 'em I'm a dook, if that'll do any good.

RENE Mother, do you think Mrs Muggins will come upstairs again? It will ruin everything if she does.

BILL Why, what's the matter with old Mother Muggins? She's a good sort, I reckon.

RENE But, you see, Daphne thinks that the whole house belongs to us. I mean, she has no idea that we're simply living in rooms.

BILL [crossing L C] Crikey! You ain't 'alf led these pals of yours up the garden! [At table] 'Ello—what's this? Bloaters! 'Ere, do let's cook 'em. I just fancy one.

RENE [rising] Put those horrible things away at once!

BILL [smelling the bloaters] Why, what's up? They ain't gone bad or anything like that, 'ave they?

[Enter EMILY, ROSE, and GEORGIE L. ROSE is carrying a fairly large bundle or bag]

EMILY [slightly out of breath] 'Ere's the lobster paste, Ma. [Crossing R] I'm sorry I've been such a long time, but I found Georgie playing in the street, and I 'ad to chase 'im to make 'im come in. Rose caught 'im in the end.

MRS BROWN [rising] Come here, Georgie. I thought I told you not to play in the street this afternoon? Now you'll have to be washed again.

## 44 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

GEORGIE [coming D R of tea table] Oh, Muvver, 'ave I got to stay in just 'cos that silly girl's comin' to tea?

RENE [taking GEORGIE by the shoulders] Why, just look at your face!

GEORGIE Ow can I look at me face? I ain't cross-eyed

RENE [secretly] Fancy going about so that every one can see what you had for breakfast this morning!

GEORGIE [crooking it and wiping his mouth] I ain't. You can't see what I 'ad for breakfast this morning!

RENE Yes, I can I can see by your mouth that you had eggs

GEORGIE [with an air of triumph] Well, you're wrong then, see? That was yesterday's breakfast! [Exit GEORGIE R.

RENE [R C] Oh Bill do put those bloaters away!

BILL [going up C with bloaters] All right keep your 'air on

ROSE [coming D L] Rene, old girl, I've kept my promise, and brought you a few things what I borrowed from my missus [Placing bundle on armchair] I knew you wanted things to look posh this afternoon, so when she wasn't looking I just 'elped myself to these.

[Produces teapot, cream jug, etc., which she hands to RENE.

RENE [coming D L of table and arranging china] Thanks ever so much, Rose.

ROSE My, but you're lucky to be at school instead of being like me—out in service! My missus ain't 'alf a one, you know. If she knew I'd borrowed these things she wouldn't 'alf go on at me [Suddenly producing a lorgnette from the bundle] Ere, 'ow d'you like this? I bought it at Woolworth's for your mum. I thought p'raps it might 'elp 'er to cut a dash this afternoon.

[ROSE performs antics with lorgnette, and finally hands it to MRS BROWN. Meanwhile RENE is looking very critically at tea-table]

RENE [*reluctantly*] Mother, *must* you serve tea this way?

MRS BROWN [*R of table*] Well, surely there's nothing the matter with the tea-table?

RENE [*above table*] Well, there's a great deal too much food on the table

BILL [*up c*] 'Ere, you speak for yourself! I'm 'ungry!

RENE. You see, smart people don't serve tea in this way. They have very little to eat in the afternoon, because they always have late dinner in the evening

BILL Oh, do they? Well, we 'ad dinner nearly four hours ago, and you ain't going to git no more to night. What's more, I'm 'ungry, and I want my regular tea, even if you don't, d'you see?

RENE [*ignoring him*] Mother, when Daphne and I had tea with Sybil Manners we didn't sit at a table like this. We just grouped ourselves about the room, and then the maid handed round cups of tea and dainty tea cakes

BILL Yes, you coconut—but we ain't got no maid

[RENE, *above table*, is very depressed] MRS BROWN,

R C, EMILY, R, and ROSE, L C, are deep in thought

ROSE [*with sudden inspiration*] I know, Rene, old girl! It's my afternoon off, so why not let me be the maid?

RENE. Oh, no, Rose! I can't let you do that

ROSE Why not? I'd just love it. I've got my cap and apron in 'ere [*indicating bundle*], and it won't take me 'alf a minute to put 'em on. [Placing bundle on table] You leave it to me, old girl. I'll make these swell friends of yours think you've been living at the Grosvenor all your life

RENE. Rose, you are a little sport!

ROSE [*taking left side of table*] Now, Bill, you catch 'old of that table and we'll put it in the next room. Then I'll serve tea from there, so as you won't know you ain't at the Ritz

BILL [entering into the spirit of the affair] Oh, all right ! Of course, if there's a game on it's me for a bit of sport every time ! [Places dish of bloaters on chair and takes right side of table] Of course, if you want me to do 'the grand,' why, then, I'll do it with the best of 'em

[BILL and ROSE carry table off R]

RENE [carefully arranging chairs in a large semicircle] This will look much better

BILL [re-entering] Ere—mind what you're doing with them bloaters [Crouching L.C. and taking dish of bloaters] Rene, I'm going toelp you kid your grand friend this afternoon—but, mind, as soon as she's gone we're going to cook these bloaters

RENE [L.] I knew you wouldn't let me down, Bill. Now, listen ! Please be careful what you say while we're having tea. Don't talk about anything that sounds common, and if I want you to change the subject I'll tap with my foot—like that [Taps very softly on floor]

BILL All right. But you won't need to do that. I'm going to show you what I can do this afternoon. I'm going to surpass myself

RENE [miffing] Oh, what an awful smell !

MRS BROWN [miffing] Mrs Muggins must be cooking her bloaters [Bell rings off L.]

RENE [in alarm] That was a ring at the front door. Daphne must be here [Enter ROSE, tearing cap and apron]

ROSE All right. I'll answer the door. Sit down all of you and look comfortable [With the air of a theatrical producer] Mrs Brown, use your lorgnette. Hurry, you be at the piano [Exit L.]

[MRS BROWN sits on settee, holding the lorgnette]

*The effect is most incongruous* EMILY sits at piano and starts playing some hackneyed piece, such as "The Blue Bells of Scotland" Her touch is undoubtedly that of a beginner

RENE [with almost a scream] Bill—the bloaters!

[At sound of RENE's exclamation MRS BROWN starts violently and EMILY makes a clashing discord and stops playing

RENE [to BILL] Quickly! Put them away—she's coming upstairs!

BILL [looking desperately about the room] Where shall I put 'em?

[Suddenly he dashes over to piano, and in the nick of time conceals the dish beneath a pile of music

ROSE [off L] Will you step this way, please? [In doorway] Miss Daphne Mortimer is 'ere

[Enter DAPHNE. She is well dressed, but her clothes are neat rather than 'showy'

RENE [going up L and kissing DAPHNE] Hello, Daphne! So here you are at last

DAPHNE. Hello, Rene! I'm sorry I'm late

RENE [bringing DAPHNE D R C] This is my mother Mother, this is my friend, Daphne Mortimer

MRS BROWN [half rising, then seating herself again, in obvious doubt as to whether or not she should rise] How are you, my dear? Rene has told me so much about you

RENE [performing introductions] This is my sister Emily, and this is my brother William

GEORGIE [off R.] Muvver! [Her voice is piercing] Muvver! Can I use this clean towel, or am I s'posed to leave that for the visitors?

[MRS BROWN and RENE are very embarrassed  
EMILY goes hurriedly off R.]

BILL [R C., to DAPHNE] That's our brother Georgie 'E's a bit of a nub, you know, but I expect they'll improve 'im next year, when 'e goes to 'Arrow

RENE [softly tapping with her foot] Daphne, I expect you'd like a cup of tea. Do sit down and make yourself comfortable

[RENE pushes BILL, who places a comfortable chair C. for DAPHNE. RENE sits L.C., and BILL crosses L.

RENE [to ROSE] Yvonne, bring tea, please

ROSE [momentarily nonplussed at being addressed by a French name] Er—yes— Yes, muma [Exit R]

DAPHNE. Is your maid French? You are lucky to have such a nice girl when good servants are so scarce

RENE. Yes we are lucky

BILL [sitting L.] Oh, I don't know. We ad to get rid of the chauffeur this morning. 'E was an awfully good driver, too, but 'e was too fond of speeding. 'E nearly caused trouble with a policeman last week when 'e was bringing us back from our little place in the country.

DAPHNE [surprised] Have you a house in the country?

BILL [pleased with the impression he is making] Oh yes, we've got a nice little place just outside Southend [Confidentially] Of course, we're only living 'ere for a bit, you know, until the workmen finish doing up our regular place in Park Lane [RENE taps softly with her foot

[Enter ROSE, carrying tray of tea-cups, etc., which she hands round to the company]

MRS BROWN [looking through lorgnette at DAPHNE] Do you live far from here, my dear?

DAPHNE. Well, not so very far. We live very close to the Heath—at Hampstead—so, considering that we live in London, we manage to get plenty of fresh air.

BILL [smiffing] Talking of fresh air, do you notice a smell of fish in here?

[MRS BROWN half rises and looks nervously at the music]

BILL. No—cooked fish, I mean

DAPHNE. Yes—now that you mention it—I believe I can smell fish.

BILL. That's our cook getting dinner ready. She will start cooking it in the afternoon, but, of course, we 'ave to give way to 'er

[Enter EMILY and GEORGIE R. GEORGIE is wearing a clean collar and has a well scrubbed appearance]

EMILY [to DAPHNE] This is our little brother, Georgie

DAPHNE [to GEORGIE] How do you do?

GEORGIE [scowling] What 'ave they done wiv the tea table? Ain't I goin' to 'ave no cake?

MRS BROWN Of course you are, dear, Come and sit beside me

[GEORGIE reluctantly sits L. of settee EMILY sits up R.C]

DAPHNE [to BILL] What kind of car is yours?

BILL [airily] Oh, we 'ave a Rolls, you know, for family use, but I drive a sports myself

RENE Can you drive, Daphne?

DAPHNE No, not yet Daddy's going to teach me when he has time, but just now he's awfully busy

MRS BROWN [with exaggerated care] Your father is a stockbroker, is he not?

GEORGIE [helping himself to cake] Our Dad's always saying that 'e's broke too

MRS BROWN I'm afraid that Georgie's accent is becoming terribly bad

GEORGIE [his mouth full of cake] Why, what's the matter wiv me accent?

ROSE [to DAPHNE] Will you take any more tea?

DAPHNE No, thank you

GEORGIE [in surprise] What! Don't you want no more cake? You ain't 'ad ardly any yet

RENE [interrupting] I do wish you'd play for us, Daphne I'd love Mother to hear you play

DAPHNE But I have no music with me

MRS BROWN Please play for us, dear I should love to hear you

[DAPHNE rises and crosses R. to piano]

\* Piano solo or song can be arranged if desired

BILL. Play something lively. There was a thung my pal Lord Marmadook and I 'eard the other night at the 'Ippodrome I forget what it's called, but it goes like this [Whistles a very hackneyed dance tune. RENE taps with her foot.] A couple of darkies sang it fine, and there was Lord Marmadook and me up in the— [Aside to RENE] Why, what are you tapping for? I ain't said nuffin' now.

DAPHNE [looking through RENE's music] Have you any of Chopin's music here?

BILL [puzzled] No—I don't think we know 'im.

DAPHNE. Perhaps you have some of the Beethoven Sonatas. [Suddenly ducking out of bloaters] Why, what-ever—

GEORGIE. Garn! Those ain't tomatoes — they're bloaters!

DENE [crossing R. in great alarm] Oh, those—those are some fish that were caught by a friend of ours.

BILL [brightly] That's right. Lord Marmadook caught 'em off Margate pier. You see, 'e's a great pal of ours, so 'e thought maybe we'd like 'em.

DAPHNE [puzzled] However does he manage to er'ch fish like these?

BILL. Well, you see, 'e uses a bit of snuff as 'is bait. Then when the fish comes up to sneeze 'e just nobbles 'im one with 'is stick.

[RENE, who has been softly tapping during this speech, now taps much more loudly]

MRS MUGGINS [off L.] All right, dearie, I'm coming.

DAPHNE [in surprise] Why, who is that?

BILL [rising, slightly nervous] That— Oh, that's the cook!

GEORGIE. No, it ain't. It's Mrs Muggins.

[Enter MRS MUGGINS L.]

MRS MUGGINS. Well, 'ere I am. I thought I 'eard you knocking before, but I weren't sure. Now, what—

[Suddenly noticing DAPHNE] Why, love a duck, it's Daphne!

DAPHNE [rushing to MRS MUGGINS and embracing her] Why, I d no idea that you were here!

MRS MUGGINS [kissing DAPHNE] Daphne—my dear little girl!

RENE [in bewilderment] Mrs Muggins, do you and Daphne know each other?

MRS MUGGINS [up L.C.] Know each other? Why 'eavens above, she's my brother Joe's little girl! You've card me speak of my brother Joe, 'aven't you? You know, 'im as keeps the fish shop in Camden Town

DAPHNE [greatly embarrassed] Auntie Maggie please— Oh, why did you tell them that?

MRS MUGGINS Why, dearie—what 'ave I said? What's upsetting you?

DAPHNE [almost in tears] Oh, I—I—didn't want these people to know that Father's in the fish trade [To RENE and BILL] I'm afraid I've been an awful fool in trying to keep the truth from you, but when I heard about your friends in the nobility and about your mansion in Park Lane I was afraid you'd despise me if you knew about the fish shop

MRS MUGGINS Daphne, what are you talking about? Friends in the nobility—a mansion in Park Lane! [Indicating BILL] 'Im with a mansion in Park Lane? Why, 'e borrowed 'alf a crown off me last week! [To BILL] And that reminds me, me lad you 'aven't paid it back

DAPHNE [beginning to grasp the situation] Then—then you mean— [Joyously] Oh, Rene, have you been bluffing too?

RENE [going up L.C. to DAPHNE and taking her hands] Daphne, dear old girl, I feel awfully ashamed of myself, but I thought you'd despise me if you knew we lived here in rooms, so I—I tried to make a good impression

## 52 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

DAPHNE. And I was such a duffer that I thought you'd never speak to me again if you found out about Father's fish shop [Laughing] Oh, what a couple of idiots we've been! [To MRS MUGGINS] Auntie Maggie will you ever forgive me for speaking to you as I did just now?

MRS MUGGINS [putting her arm round DAPHNE] Of course, darling Your old auntie would do anything for you

DAPHNE [thoughtfully] Anything? Then, Auntie Maggie, will you do me one great favour? I've been out all the afternoon and I'm dreadfully hungry. Will you please cook me one of those blotters for my tea?

CURTAIN

HIGGINS  
THE HIGHWAYMAN OF CRANFORD  
*A Play for Boys*  
By RONALD GOW

CHARACTERS

EDWARD HIGGINS  
EZEKIEL SNIPER  
JOE SNAG  
DICK  
GREASY SAM  
JACK GUTTER  
SIMON KETCH AND OTHER  
MEMBERS OF THE GANG  
A BOY  
SIR PETER COLVILLE  
MARY, *his daughter*  
AN OFFICER AND SOLDIERS

SCENE: *Cranford in the eighteenth century.*

## 52 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

DAPHNE. And I was such a duffer that I thought you'd never speak to me again if you found out about Father's fish-shop. *[Laughing]* Oh, what a couple of idiots we've been! *[To MRS MUGGINS]* Auntie Maggie, will you ever forgive me for speaking to you as I did just now?

MRS MUGGINS *(putting her arm round DAPHNE)*. Of course, darling. Your old auntie would do anything for you.

DAPHNE *(thoughtfully)*. Anything? Then, Auntie Maggie, will you do me one great favour? I've been out all the afternoon, and I'm dreadfully hungry. Will you please cook me one of those bloaters for my tea?

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AN OFFICER AND SOLDIERS

SCENE *Cranford in the eighteenth  
century*

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Those who know Knutsford, the ' Cranford ' of Mrs Gaskell, will remember the association of that town with a highwayman. Local tradition asserts that he led a double life, hobnobbing with the Cheshire gentry, and incidentally robbing them, and at other times consorting with thieves and vagabonds. It has been held by Thomas de Quincey and by Mrs Gaskell that Higgins was nothing more than a common scoundrel. Unlike other less deserving highwaymen, Edward Higgins has never been given his fair share of literary whitewash. I beg to repair the omission.

## NOTE FOR THE PRODUCER

It is advisable to use very simple scenery when staging this play. Perhaps dark curtains are most satisfactory as a background. By changing the furniture and lighting alone little time is lost between the scenes.

The songs may, of course, be left out, but they certainly 'help the show along.' The music of Jamaica and *O Rare Turpin* will be found in *The Minstrelsy of England*, published by Bayley and Ferguson. *Twanky Dillo* is in *Songs by the Way*, published by the Holiday Fellowship. *Under the Rose* may be found in any collection of Anne's music, or in *Songs of England* published by Chappell, and *Gomj Joan* in *Songs of the British Isles* published by Curwen.

# HIGGINS<sup>1</sup>

## SCENE I

SCENE: *The Rose and Crown* *The tap room is full of sinister men, who are singing lustily*

ALL [singing<sup>2</sup>]

"Drunk to-day while throats are dry,  
Banish care and sorrow,  
Somebody will pay the bill,  
Leave it for the morrow  
When you drown a cat in water  
Nine times you must do it  
So, to drown your thirst in liquor,  
Generous be, or rue it"

[General applause EZEKIEL SNIPE, who wears a black eye-shade, rises to his feet

EZEKIEL. And here's to Higgins, the prince of highwaymen!

JOE. Sit down, Ezekiel Snipe We've had enough of Higgins here

EZEKIEL. That's black treason you're talking, Joe Snag,

<sup>1</sup> Separate copies of this play may be obtained from Messrs Gowans and Gray, Ltd., 53 Cadogan Street, Glasgow. All applications to perform the play in the British Empire (except Canada and New Zealand) must be addressed to the Incorporated Society of Authors, Playwrights, and Composers, 11 Gower Street, London, W.C.1. For permission to perform in America and Canada application should be made to the Baker International Play Bureau, 41 Winter Street, Boston, Mass., U.S.A. New Zealand agent Miss Blake, 108 Plunket Street, Kelburn, Wellington.

<sup>2</sup> *Tune, Jamboree*

as you'll werry soon find to your cost when Higgins comes home

JOE. You can talk, Ezekiel Snipe, but you can't talk what's wrong into what's right. We want no more of him.

DICK. Ezekiel could talk a stuff 'un off the gallows any day if he'd a mind to.

JOE. Aye, and it's to the gallows his tongue will take him some day.

EZEKIEL. There's a werry pretty ballad they're singing in London now about Mr Higgins. 'Tis called *Mr Higgins and the Lawyer*. I hear the ladies dote on it.

VOICES. Sing it! Pipe up! [Etc]

EZEKIEL. On your own 'eads be it! This is the true and highly original version as sung before his Majesty the King—Gawd bless him! [Laughter]

[Singing:]

"On Cranford Heath as I rode o'er,  
I spied a lawyer riding before  
'Kind sir,' said I, 'aren't you afraid  
Of Higgins, that mischievous blade?'

Chorus: "O rare Mister Higgins, O rare Higgins O!

"Said Higgins, 'He'd ne'er find me out,  
I've hid my money in my boot.'  
The Lawyer says, 'There's none can find  
My gold stitched in my cape behind.'

Chorus: "O rare Mister Higgins, etc.

"As they rode nigh to Bucklow Hill  
Higgins commands him to stand still.  
Said he, 'Your cape I must cut off,  
My mare she wants a saddle-cloth.'

Chorus

'Twas, O Rare Lawyer

' This caused the Lawyer much to fret  
 To think he was so fairly hit ;  
 But Higgins robbed him of his store  
 Because he knew he'd lie for more

Chorus

[General laughter]

JOE It may be a good song, Ezekiel, but it ain't true  
 Higgins ain't got the pluck for the roads nowadays Too  
 much soft living in high Society has done him in

EZEKIEL Well, if so be you've cause for complaint, why  
 don't you tell him ?

SAM Yah ! With his *Mister Higgins* and his fine airs  
 and his Frenchy fal-de-lals ! What's the good ?

JOE Boys, I put it to the Gang Are we satisfied ?

GANG No !

JOE Have we so much as filched an old maid's reticule  
 these past three weeks ?

GANG No !

JOE Can we pay for the liquor we're drinking now ?

GANG No !

JOE We're living on tick. Trade's bad We haven't  
 had a job for weeks Does the guv nor help us ?

GANG No !

JOE There you are, then What's the use of the  
 guv'nor ?

JACK He hasn't been seen in Cranford a month gone

SIMON The noble profession of the road ain't what it  
 used to be In my young days highwaymen was highway-  
 men, and not gilded lilies

EZEKIEL Ah, but travellers ain't what they used to be,  
 there's the trouble Carry pop-guns and what-not, and  
 leave their money at home

JOE Gentlemen of the Cranford Gang, I ask you, is  
 Higgins your rightful leader, or am I ?

GANG Joe Snag ! Good old Joe !

[Etc]

## 58 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

EZEKIEL. Joe Snag, you'll sing another tune when Mr Higgins comes home

JOE. Less of that flop-jaw, Ezekiel Snipe, or I'll put a leaden pill in your innards!

EZEKIEL. Bah! At the name of a gun your heart's in your mouth

JOE. Take that back! Do you hear? Take that back, Ezekiel Snipe, or I'll shoot! I'm not afraid of blood! I'll show who's leader here!

*[A horse heard galloping, a voice calls, and a rider draws rein in the cobble'd yard]*

EZEKIEL. Hark, that's the guv'nor!

HIGGINS *[off stage]* Ho, boy! See to the horse

JOE. Aye, it's Higgins—curse him! *[HIGGINS enters]*

HIGGINS. Good evening, gentlemen. My deplorable absence is regretted more deeply by no one than myself. A pressing social engagement has detained me in town. Is that gun loaded, Joe Snag?

JOE. Aye, that it is

HIGGINS. Put it up, man, put it up! I detest a loaded weapon in the hands of a born fool. *[General laughter]*

EZEKIEL. Mr Higgins!

HIGGINS. Well, Ezekiel, faithful friend, what now?

EZEKIEL. Joe's got news for you, guv

HIGGINS. News, eh? Our cars are at your service, Joe.

JOE. Well, Mr Higgins, we've decided, in a manner of speaking, that, having consideration, so to speak, for the time you've been away, and the general shortage of money—

HIGGINS. What? My brave boys are short of money?

GANG. Aye, that we are!

*[Etc]*

DICK. Three weeks on tick.

EZEKIEL. Living on our reputations, so to speak.

HIGGINS. Haven't you a penny among you?

GANG. No! Not a blessed one!

*[Etc]*

HIGGINS. H'm! That's odd, for neither have I. In

short, that is the precise reason why I came among you again I have discovered that London streets are not paved with gold, and Fortune has been unkind to me at the tables of Society Did I repine? Did I seek the unprofitable consolation of melancholy? No, no! To horse, and home to Cranford Town! Ah, Cranford mine, sweet jewel of Cheshire's bosom! Thou dreaming city of the bosky plain! Pardon this digression Gentlemen of the Road, we have no money

GANG No 1

HIGGINS But we have wit, beauty, brains, and brawn While there's a coach on the road and purses to be purloined we shall not lack the emoluments of an honourable profession

GANG Hooray!

HIGGINS Meanwhile let us strain the resources of our reputation still further, and call upon the proprietors of this excellent establishment to replenish our glasses Ho, boy!

[*A POT BOY enters*

BOY At your service, sir

HIGGINS These gentlemen would drink See to it

BOY They've run up a mighty long score already, sir

HIGGINS Silence, surlah! Do as I bid you

BOY Very good, sir

GANG Hooray! Good old guv!

[*Etc*

HIGGINS Stay, I'll give you a toast Gentlemen, we'll drink to the road and all good fellows!

SIMON And dry rot to the gallows!

HIGGINS [singing<sup>1</sup>]

"Here's a health to the jolly road, boys,  
The winding white highway!  
With a good horse beneath ye,  
Who'll follow me my way?

<sup>1</sup> *Tune, Twenty Dillo*

## 60 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

Then away, boot and saddle,  
The moon's shining bright,  
For it's stand and deliver  
At the cross roads to-night !

*Chorus :* " Twanky dillo, twanky dillo,  
twanky dillo, dillo, dillo, dillo  
Let the King have his gallows  
We'll drink to good fellows !

" Here's to all highway robbers  
The noble profession !  
We're men of fine manners,  
Who brook no oppression  
Then away, boot and saddle," etc.

JOE. That's all my eye and Betty Martin, that is ! You may think you've got a voice, guv, but you ain't going to earn your living singing of *Twanky Dillo*.

HOOTON. Alas, Humanity ! Thus are the poets and fine singers rejected by the world. I have dreamed great dreams in vain. I had envisaged a noble company of highwaymen galloping over the broad roads of the earth, chouring in harmony with the celestial spheres. I had thought to raise robbery from the stinking gutter to the regions of fine art. I looked for men whose deeds would be poems, whose lives would be literature, so that the boyhood of posterity might read of us in safety. Men who could hold up a coach to the *tempo* of a fine old minuet. Men who could slit a purse, or a throat, maybe, with a gracious artistry. Men who could face the gallows with sweet complacency and happy jest. And what—what do I find ? What mockery of my vision confronts me when I wake from dreaming ? What hideous counterfeit of mankind ? Joe Snag wants money ! Money ! Ah !

[He groans]

EZEKIEL. Come on, Mr Higgins, you've got to face life as it is, not as you'd like it to be [Loud snoring]

HIGGINS. What, Ezekiel, is that noise?

EZEKIEL. They're all asleep, sir

HIGGINS Asleep! Rouse up, there! You sleep through my most exquisite soliloquies! Gentlemen, I blush for you

SAM [yawning] It ain't men you want, guv, it's angels

JACK. I ain't had a square meal for a week

JOE Of course we want money We'll talk about chivalry and fine poems when we get some food inside us

HIGGINS Ha, food! Brave boys, forgive this idle dreaming What o'clock is it, Ezekiel?

EZEKIEL. It wants a quarter to nine, and a fine moonlight night, your honour

HIGGINS To action, gentlemen! I am cursed with the finer emotions A surfeit of ideals is like a surfeit of wine it paralyses the wit. Let me unfold my plan Draw closer Boy, stand at the door and give the sign against intruders Gentlemen, your ears To night there is posting from London a gentleman of this town You know him well—Sir Peter Colville, who has swom never to rest till he has me dangling on a gallows [Loughing] I have designed a pretty trap for my noble enemy

[Evil laughter from the GANG]

EZEKIEL. Good old guv! Saved us from starvation again

JOE Aye Sir Peter Colville may be his enemy, but I've heard as Sir Peter's daughter's a particular friend of Mr Higgins

SAM I don't like this gallivantin' in Sossiety!

HIGGINS Fools! Nobody suspects that Mr Higgins, gentleman of Cranford, is the same as Higgins, the scourge of the highways Sir Peter's daughter is nothing to me But tell me, Joe Snag, tell me this if I had not gallivanted in Society, as you are pleased to call it, how could I have

## 62 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

known, as I know now with all the certainty in the world, that in Sir Peter's coach there is, at this very moment, the interesting little sum of six thousand pounds ?

[Tremendous excitement]

EZEKIEL Six thousand !

HIGGINS Aye, in hard cash I saw him win it at the tables in London He travels alone, so much I have ascertained Before midnight his coach will be crossing the Heath Gentlemen, do we hold up that coach ?

GANG Aye !

HIGGINS Am I not, gentlemen, the perfect highwayman ?

GANG Aye !

HIGGINS Am I to understand that you prefer Joe Snag for your leader ?

GANG No !

HIGGINS Very well, then, to business ! Gentlemen, at our rendezvous on the Heath in thirty minutes !

CURTAIN

### SCENE II

SCENE The Heath It is a moonlight night A negro poses to London and to Cranford HIGGINS stands, masked on a small hill at the back The GANG crouch by the roadside

HIGGINS Silence ! Gentlemen of the Road, are we all ready ?

GANG Aye !

HIGGINS Are your pistols primed and is your powder dry ?

GANG Aye !

HIGGINS You have your knives against the chance of foolish, noisy throats ?

GANG Aye !

HIGGINS Good ! I shall now address the moon  
JOE. Ow, put a stopper in it !

JACK No more sermons, guv, if you love us

HIGGINS It is fitting that I should pay my respects to  
my Lady Moon, the Queen of the Night

JOE. Women again !

HIGGINS Silence for the apostrophe ! O Moon in-  
scrutable maiden, alone, supreme resplendent in an empty  
sky, smile on our enterprise Higgins greets you Higgins  
returns your smile Like you, O Lady Moon, Higgins  
stands alone, supreme, resplendent in an empty world

DICK Garn ! You got that out of a book

JOE. Come off it, guv ! You'll be the death of us yet  
[The rolling of wheels, clatter of hoofs, and jingling  
of harness

HIGGINS Hark ! The coach draws near

EZEKIEL. Douse the glim !

HIGGINS You, Joe, when the time comes, forward and  
give the challenge

JOE Aye, and a knife for Sir Peter

HIGGINS None of that, Joe ! I detest blood

EZEKIEL Here she rolls !

HIGGINS Now—forward !

[A deep throated roar as the GANG dash forward  
out of sight Cries of Stand and deliver !  
The coach is heard to stop

HIGGINS Ha, Ezekiel ! These are golden moments !  
Life's richest bounties are but momentary Seize the  
fleeting vision—the sights, the sounds, the smells See  
now the rocking coach, stalled like a wounded eagle in its  
flight, the fiery steeds pawing the treacherous air, the  
steam-clouds reeking from their gleaming flanks [Shots

EZEKIEL. Hark, the pops are out ! The coachman is  
armed, guv

## 62 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

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*[Tremendous excitement]*

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GANG. Aye!

HIGGINS. Am I to understand that you prefer Joe Snag for your leader?

GANG. No!

HIGGINS. Very well then to business! Gentlemen, set our rendezvous on the Heath in thirty minutes!

CURTAIN

### SCENE II

SCENE The Heath. It is a moonlight night. A signpost points to London and to Cranford. Higgins stands marked on a small hill at the back. The GANG crouch by the roadside.

HIGGINS. Silence! Gentlemen of the Road are we all ready?

GANG. Aye!

HIGGINS. Are your pistols primed and is your powder dry?

GANG. Aye!

HIGGINS. You have your knives against the chance of foolish, noisy throats?

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JOE Women again !

HIGGINS Silence for the apostrophe ! O Moon, inscrutable maiden, alone, supreme resplendent in an empty sky, smile on our enterprise Higgins greets you Higgins returns your smile Like you O Lady Moon, Higgins stands alone, supreme, resplendent in an empty world

DICK Garn ! You got that out of a book

JOE Come off it, guv ! You'll be the death of us yet  
*[The rolling of wheels, clatter of hoofs, and jingling of harness]*

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HIGGINS Now—forward !

*[A deep-throated roar as the GANG dash forward out of sight. Cries of 'Stand and deliver !' The coach is heard to stop]*

HIGGINS Ha, Ezekiel ! These are golden moments ! Life's richest bounties are but momentary Seize the fleeting vision—the sights, the sounds, the smells See now the rocking coach, stalled like a wounded eagle in its flight, the fiery steeds pawing the treacherous air, the steam-clouds reeking from their gleaming flanks [Shots

EZEKIEL Hark, the pops are out ! The coachman is armed, guv

HIGGINS Aha, brave boys, they've got him ! Down he goes ! See, they roll him in the dust Steady, gentlemen ! I would not have Sir Peter harmed Good ! Here they come [The GANG enter with SIR PETER, struggling

SIR PETER What foul outrage is this ? Unhand me, villains ! I'll have the whole murderous pack of you strung on his Majesty's gallows for this

JOT Stow your gaff, ye gibbering paroquet !

HIGGINS. Ezekiel, search the coach !

EZEKIEL Aye, aye, guv ! [EZEKIEL goes out

HIGGINS Well, Sir Peter, we are old enemies Can we not be friends to-night ? These affairs are vastly improved with a little courtesy It gives a—shall we say ?—a *je ne vous quitte pas* to the proceedings when they are conducted in the sacred name of friendship

SIR PETER Friendship ! You scoundrel, you dare to talk of friendship ! You outlaw, you prison scum——

HIGGINS Gently, Sir Peter Reflect on the piquancy of the situation You, sir, are honoured by the attention of England's greatest highwayman I, sir, am honoured to bestow my attention upon an aristocrat.

SIR PETER Treacherous scoundrel ! I'll have you hunted from the earth ! I'll never rest till I have justice done, and safety on the King's highway !

[Enter EZEKIEL carrying money-bags and leading SIR PETER's daughter

EZEKIEL. Here's the swag, guv'nor And I found this lady hiding in the coach

HIGGINS. You should have left her there, Ezekiel We do not inconvenience women Madam, I am at your service

SIR PETER Do not address my daughter, sir !

HIGGINS I am dazzled by your good fortune in having such a daughter, Sir Peter

MART Father, I know that voice

EZEKIEL Now you've done it, guy That's what comes of too much talking

MARY [to HIGGINS] I think, sir, we have met before  
[She goes to him]

HIGGINS Madam, you have the advantage, although I would we could meet often

MARY [tearing off his mask] Edward!

SIR PETER Zounds! It's you, Mr Edward Higgins! So you are Higgins, the notorious highwayman!

HIGGINS Sir, it is a name not unknown in England Your accomplished daughter has penetrated my disguise

SIR PETER Monster, your perfidy grows deeper every moment. You are the man who has masqueraded as my friend, partaken of my hospitality, and eaten at my table! You black hearted villain!

HIGGINS Entirely a matter of opinion, Sir Peter. As a man of property, you have some justification for the observation

MARY And why did you not tell me, sir, when you professed your devotion for me, that you were nothing more than a common thief?

HIGGINS Not a thief, madam, but a highwayman, and a gentleman of the road. [The GANG cheer]

JOE Come on, now! Cut out the *politesse* and get to the swag!

HIGGINS Back you get, Joe Snag! Gentlemen of the Gang, are you utterly devoid of dramatic sensibility? Have you no taste for a piquant situation?

JOE Garn! It's swag we want, not sermons

HIGGINS. Gentlemen, I have conceived a magnificent gesture. This lady is known to me, and for her sake not a penny do we take

JOE What's that? He's mad! [Angry murmur]

HIGGINS. Hence, and leave your booty!

EZEKIEL Guv'nor, you ain't leaving this six thousand?

## 66 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

HIGGINS I have spoken. Ezekiel, return the swag to the coach. Make way for Sir Peter and the lady.

GANG He's barmy! We ain't leaving six thousand! [Etc]

HIGGINS Silence! Gentlemen, to the road! I shoot the first who drobey's!

JOE He's chicken hearted, boys. Think of your wives and children. Down with him!

*(There is a roar and the beginning of a rush; but*

*HIGGINS shoots, and JOE falls back into the arms of the GANG HIGGINS raises his hat*

HIGGINS In thy name O Chivalry!

*(HIGGINS is standing on the eminence, very proud of his attitude. The GANG cover back on one side. On the other EZEKIEL is leading SIR PETER and his daughter to the coach)*

CURTAIN

### SCENE III

SCENE The Rose and Crown again. Horses are heard in the yard. Enter HIGGINS, followed by EZEKIEL and the POT-BOY

HIGGINS. Here we are, Ezekiel! We'll drink a parting glass to Cranford.

EZEKIEL. But you ain't safe 'ere, guy. They'll search the Rose and Crown first.

HIGGINS. Nonsense! This tavern is the last place they'll think to find me now. Ho, boy, fetch wine!

BOY Yes sir

HIGGINS And remember, boy, should anyone ask questions you have not seen me.

BOY Very good, Mr Higgins

[He goes out]

EZEKIEL The game's up, guv

HIGGINS But I have not lost the game, my friend

EZEKIEL The Gang have left you, every man

HIGGINS I expected that, Ezekiel

EZEKIEL I ain't left you, guv

HIGGINS Ah, Ezekiel, you are unwise

EZEKIEL I stands by you, sir, come what may. There's no good comes of crying over spilled liquor, and, according to my philosophy, when you don't know which way to turn you just goes on following your nose

[Singing<sup>1</sup>]

" Od's, guv nor, ne'er sigh for a trifle like this,  
 Nor let minor troubles endanger your bliss,  
 All truly great leaders, 'tis well understood,  
 Were in the same boat when they dared to be good.  
 Though friends turn against you in face of distress,  
 And countless the sorrows that round you may press,  
 Though roads may be dark and infested by foes,  
 In time of great danger just follow your nose "

HIGGINS This is most excellent counsel, Ezekiel, and I thank you for it. I shall indeed follow my nose

EZEKIEL Werry good, sir. Anyhow, it weren't your fault we failed to night

HIGGINS Failed! Ezekiel, you said 'failed'?

EZEKIEL Well, sir, in a manner of speaking

HIGGINS The crowning success of my career I have excelled myself. I have behaved magnificently I have sacrificed all for a woman

EZEKIEL It's a bad habit of yours, sir

HIGGINS A woman, mark you, for whom I cherish no tender affection I have lost six thousand pounds for the sake of a chivalrous ideal. Ezekiel, I am the most interesting man I know I thoroughly approve of myself

<sup>1</sup> *Tune, A Pretty Girl under the Rose (Arne).*

## 68 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

EZEKIEL. Well, of course, if you're happy, Mr Higgins, there you are. But it do seem a bit tough on the boys.

HIGGINS. To make Romance safe for posterity there, Ezekiel, is the mission of my life. Money? Bah! What worth is money? A want, a glitter, a sensation, and—gone! But Romance is the pure gold of eternity, the rare-spun goosander of illusion, and this alone is real.

BOY [entering with drinks] Your wine, sir?

HIGGINS. Thank you, boy. Set it down. I am at present occupied in philosophy.

BOY Very good, sir.

HIGGINS. And—ah—boy?

BOY Yes, sir.

HIGGINS. I have reason to believe that you are faithful to me.

BOY I'd follow you anywhere, sir. I want to be a highwayman myself.

HIGGINS. You—a highwayman! Oh, Ezekiel, I am tickled. What do you know of an honourable profession?

BOY I'm quick at learning, sir. My greatest ambition is to be a highwayman.

### Trio<sup>1</sup>

BOY "To be a highwayman  
Is my supreme ambition  
I'd ride the road at dead of night  
With cloak and mask and pistols bright;  
I'd give my ears if I might be  
A highwayman."

HIGGINS. "Now sure this boy is mad  
To make this strange petition,

<sup>1</sup> *True, Garry Jones.*

How can a youth so small and weak  
 E'er hope to master our technique ?  
 A highwayman is born, not made,  
 My foolish boy "

EZEKIEL. " Now harkee my advice ,  
 Refuse this boy admission  
 'Tis my belief the boy's a spy,  
 Upon our secrets he will pry,  
 So by your leave I'll box his ears  
 And turn him out "

ALL. " To be a highwayman  
 We cannot grant permission  
 { Oh, give me your permission "

EZEKIEL. " A highwayman is born, not made "

HIGGINS " We ply a most exclusive trade '

ALL. " And so it's plain {you'll} {I'll} never be  
 A highwayman "

HIGGINS And so that, my young friend, is that Mean-  
 while keep a sharp look-out at the door, for we have  
 enemies in the town

BOY Very well, sir [He goes

HIGGINS Ezekiel, I believe that boy admires me The  
 appreciation of the young is the surest foundation for  
 Romance But tell me, Ezekiel, tell me the criticism of  
 posterity What will the boyhood of the future think of  
 me ? What will they say of Edward Higgins, gentleman  
 of the road ?

EZEKIEL. Well, sir, if I may be allowed to say it, they'll  
 probably say you talked too much and did too little Boys  
 like adventure, sir, hot and strong

HIGGINS Boys like adventure, eh ? [There is a volley  
 of shooting] Then, by gad, I think they're going to get  
 it now [The boy runs in breathlessly

70 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BOY Mr Higgins !

HIGGINS. Well, boy ?

BOY Quick ! Bolt the door ! It's the soldiers, Mr Higgins !

HIGGINS. Soldiers !

BOY They've surrounded the house. The Gang have turned King & Evidence against you, sir. Sir Peter Colville is leading them.

HIGGINS. I thunk, Ezekiel Snipe, that this is going to be interesting. Forward, Higgins, into action ! You must behave like a highwayman and an English gentleman !

BOY Hooray !

EZEKIEL. But, guv'nor, we're caught—caught like rats in a trap !

[Knocking] OFFICER [off stage] Open in the name of the King !

HIGGINS. The eye of young posterity is upon us !

EZEKIEL. What's two of us against a company of red-coats ?

BOY I'll stand by you, sir

[Knocking and splintering of wood.]

EZEKIEL. They're breaking in the door !

HIGGINS. Brave boys, we fight for Romance ! Youth and Age stand by me. Quick, the table, the chairs ! A barricade ! We must sell our lives for what they're worth !

[Smashing and shooting.]

BOY The secret passage ! We've forgotten the secret passage to the Heath !

EZEKIEL. What's that ?

HIGGINS. Where ?

BOY Here, behind the fire !

HIGGINS. Saved ! We'll beat 'em yet ! Ezekiel, open the trap ! Higgins, thy star shines yet !

[Knocking] SIR PETER [off stage] Edward Higgins, we call upon you to surrender.

EZEKIEL. Trap's a bit stiff, guv

HIGGINS Pull, man, for your life !

EZEKIEL There we are ! All ready, guv Shall I take the lamp ?

HIGGINS Get down, Ezekiel You, boy, follow him

VOICE Open in the name of the King ! [Knocking

HIGGINS The Law is knocking at the door of Romance ! Farewell, gentlemen ! Higgins salutes you !

*[He goes after the others through the big fireplace*

*The door is forced, and there is a struggle in the darkness*

VOICES. Here he is ! We've got him ! Hold him, lads !

SAM A light, bring a light !

*[A lantern is brought in, showing the GANG and the SOLDIERS holding a struggling figure wrapped in a cloak*

OFFICER Edward Higgins, I charge you with robbery and violence on the King's Highway Surrender in the name of the King !

*[The struggling figure is discovered to be SIR PETER himself*

SIR PETER Fools ! Blockheads ! It's I—Sir Peter ! Where is Higgins ?

SAM Well, he ain't here now

SIR PETER Perdition ! The bird has flown !

CURTAIN

#### SCENE IV

SCENE. *The Heath Enter EZEKIEL with the lamp, followed by HIGGINS and the BOY*

HIGGINS. And now, Ezekiel, faithful friend, we come to the parting of the ways Higgins must ne'er see Cranford Town again

## 72 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

EZEKIEL. You'll come back to us, guv'?

HIGGINS. Never! I must seek a cooler and more hospitable clime. The dust of Cranford is shaken from my feet. Now I must follow the road again, whithersoever it may lead me, for while there's a traveller to be looted and coaches to be plundered Higgins will never lack amusement. Cranford, I have loved you, but, alas! you care not. Some day you will cherish the memory of me, and your sons will hold themselves proud to be born in the town of Higgins's choice. You will sing of me in your ballads, and your greybeards will point out my house with doting fingers. If I have broken your laws you will forget it. No, Cranford mine, will you not remember that although a thief may be a common scoundrel a highwayman is a gentleman of the road? And that, Ezekiel, is my farewell speech.

EZEKIEL [breaking down]. This ain't the end, guv', is it?

HIGGINS. Steady, Ezekiel! It is the tragedy of all great conquerors. Alexander, Caesar, Attila, Tamerlane, Higgins—all had their end. I must pass with the great ones into history.

BOY. May I come with you, sir?

HIGGINS. You, boy? Come with me? Where?

BOY. Into history, sir.

HIGGINS. What would you do?

BOY. I would be a highwayman, sir.

HIGGINS. You a highwayman! Nonsense! I have already told you, my boy, that it is given to very few to uphold the sacred traditions of the knighthood of the road. Back to Cranford, boy, and to school with you!

[Voices are heard]

EZEKIEL. Hark! Who comes here?

HIGGINS. Down, boy! Down, Ezekiel!

[Enter the QUARTET, a melancholy company]

HIGGINS [jumping out] Stand and deliver !

*[The GANG fall to their knees, putting up their hands and begging for mercy]*

GANG It's the guv ! Spare us ! [Etc]

HIGGINS Aha, my merry crew of traitors ! So you'd turn King's Evidence against Higgins, would you ? You, Joe Snag, and Simon Ketch, and the rest of you

JOE Take us back, guv ! Don't leave us ! They've set a price on our heads

SAM The soldiers are scouring the Heath for you !

SIMON Aye, we'll follow you, guv !

HIGGINS Quite so, with your tails between your legs like a pack of beaten curs ! On your feet like men ! Do you acknowledge me your leader ?

GANG Aye !

JOE Only no more sermons, guv, if you love us !

SIMON I don't care how barmy he talks so long as he takes us back

HIGGINS So Higgins and his Gang are reunited Gentlemen, I accept your apology, and though I have much to say to you on the subject of honour and loyalty I will forgo that for the nonce

EZEKIEL But you ain't letting this boy go home ? They'll hang him

HIGGINS What, Ezekiel, is one boy more or less ? However, as he has rendered me a yeoman and a chivalrous service to-night I shall admit him to our brotherhood He is an honest boy, and honesty is a mighty advantage in a highwayman What is your name ?

BOY Richard Turpin, sir

HIGGINS Richard Turpin, eh ? The name has an excellent flavour We'll call you Dick Turpin, and you may consider yourself apprenticed to my craft Who can say that I may not make a finer highwayman of Dick Turpin than ever Higgins was ? Ah, Posterity, fickle

## 74 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

jade, who can rend thy veils inscrutable? [The GANG groans] Your pardon, gentlemen. Come, old Ezekiel, faithful scoundrell! And you, romantic boy! Link arms with Higgins! The dawn is riding early, and we three pilgrims of Romance must take the road. Our righteous enemies will die respected and unsung, but we shall live for ever in our country's song. Gentlemen to the road!

*A song, "Twainy Dillo," and the curtain falls*

# THE CENTRE-FORWARD

*By Neil Grant*

## CHARACTERS

ELSPETH LEITCH

JAMES LEITCH

SANDIE LEITCH

ROY GORDON

JANET LEITCH

## THE CENTRE-FORWARD<sup>1</sup>

SCENE The parlour of a lower middle class house occupied by the Leitch family in Cluny, a small town in the North of Scotland. Two doors, up C and up R L C, large window. Noticeable are portraits of football teams and football celebrities on walls. MRS ELSPETH LEITCH, a woman about forty five, is busy sewing, seated at table, R C

Her husband, about fifty, but a very energetic type in contrast with the marked placidity of his wife enters. He wears overcoat and muffler, and carries cap in hand

JAMES Where's Sandie? [Goes to door, up R, opens it and calls] Sandie!

ELSPETH He'll be doon the noo

JAMES [at door] Sandie!

SANDIE [off stage] I'm comin', Feyther

JAMES It's chappit two We'll be late [Impatiently]

Tut, tut!

ELSPETH Whut's a' the hurry?

JAMES D'ye think I'm gaun' to be late for the Final?

ELSPETH Whut Final?

JAMES Whut Final? Guid sakes—the North o' Scotland Cup

ELSPETH Is that so? Is Roy playin'?

<sup>1</sup> Separate copies of this play may be obtained from Messrs Gowans and Gray Ltd, 58 Cadogan Street Glasgow to whom all applications to perform the play in the British Empire (except Canada) must be addressed. For permission to perform in America and Canada application should be made to the Baker International Play Bureau 47 Winter Street Boston Mass., U.S.A.

JAMES Is Roy playin'? Does the King gang to his an coronation? Is Roy playin'?

ELSPETH Now, now, Feyther, I'm just spectrin' Every-thing in moderation, even religion, as the minister himself said. Is Roy playin'?

JAMES Yes, he's playin'. The Antelope o' the North is playin', and, what's more, he'll be scorin' the first goal for the Mechanics in the first five minutes—and we'll miss it [Goes up R] Sandie! [Quieter] Oh, there ye are [SANDIE enters, up R. *He is a youth about sixteen, arrayed, like his father, for the match. Despite his excitement he looks a little uneasy.*] The bus'll be startin' in a quarter o' an hour [Goes to window, L.C. *There is a hum of activity as he opens window.*] There'll be a great gate the day—a record. Willie Macfarlane tell t me. Aye—a lot o' folk about the toon. Anybody could tell this is a day that'll mak' history in the North o' Scotland

*(Shuts window)*

ELSPETH Whit history?

JAMES [dancing with excitement] Football history

ELSPETH Button yersel' weel up, Sandie

SANDIE (half shivering) Aye, Mither

ELSPETH Ye're shiverin', laddie

JAMES It's excitement, Mither [He is quivering with excitement himself] I was the same masel' at his age Sandie, look out for the bus

*[Pulls out paper, which he devours standing*

ELSPETH Ye havena a cold?

SANDIE No, no!

*[Moves L.C. towards window, and looks out]*

ELSPETH [to JAMES] Are ye warm enough, Feyther?

JAMES [reading] Aye, aye!

ELSPETH Ye're perspiring already—that's how ye get cold. Ye remember how yer grandfeyther came to an untimely end I'm sure that influenze came in wi' footba'

JAMES [reading] "We expect great things from the Antelope o' the North" [Putting paper in pocket] I should think we do

ELSPETH [rising and moving L.C.; looking out of window] What do they ca' him that name for?

JAMES • Because he is an 'ntelope The antelope, Mither, is one o' the swiftest—if it's no' the swiftest beast o' the field Read yer Bible, wumman, read yer Bible

[Takes out paper again]

ELSPETH [coming c] Sandie, mind now, ye're no' gaun' oot to them talkies the nicht

SANDIE [in a weak voice] All right, Mither

ELSPETH The footba'll be just enough for aye day Ye've got that picture stuff on the brain You and your talkie stars! Ye're worse than Solomon, for he stuck by his wives, but you change aboot week by week It's no' decent Now you stay at hame the nicht and leave yer Greta Garbos and sich-like to gang their ain gait Is that no' so, Feyther?

JAMES [looking up] Eh? Aye, aye! [To SANDIE] Certainly you bide at hame Besides [proudly] the Antelope is comin' to ha'e a bite o' supper wi' us Where's Janet?

ELSPETH [seating herself again] She'll be back soon She had a bit o' a headache, and she thought a walk might do her good

JAMES She'll be all right the nicht, I hope?

ELSPETH Surely

JAMES [walking up and down] It's mony a hoose in Cluny that would like to ha'e the Antelope within its wa's this nicht, I tell ye I asked him masel'—I met him at the station—he's been awa' at Aberdeen on a job I said, "Roy," I said, "the gundwife and masel would be pleased if ye could drop in the morn's nicht and ha'e a bite wi' us" Man, he was that gracious and modest like He just said "Thank ye kindly, Mr Leitch," he says,

## 16 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

"I'll be very glad" Just like that, as if he was just an ordinary body.

ELSPETH Well, isn't he?

JAMES What, wumman? A centre-forward like him an ordinary body? *(Rapidly, to himself)* Only sign o' the bus?

SANDIE *(at window)* No—there's plenty o' time

ELSPETH *(giggling)* Did—he—ask—for Janet?

JAMES *(giggling)* He did. He said, "Will Miss Lench be there?" And I said, half wokin', ye ken—

ELSPETH Oh, Feyther!

JAMES I said, "Aye, I think she will."

SANDIE *(darting forward and opening window, then outside)* Aye, he's here

JAMES *(pocketing pipe and brushing)* The bus?

SANDIE *(screaming, half out of window)* Whit!

ELSPETH Mercy me! What's the matter?

SANDIE *(coming forward, reeling)* He's no' playin'!

JAMES Who?

SANDIE The Antelope

JAMES *(reeling and clutching table)* No' playin'? The Antelope no' playin'? Who dare say such a thing? *(Goes to window. SANDIE rushes from room, up C. JAMES is now half out of window.)* Dinna tell me!

ELSPETH *(alarmed, running and going to window)* Feyther, ye'll be droppin' into the street!

JAMES *(at window)* Weelum Tod, ye're a lee-er! Ye're tellin' lies— Whit? God! *(Parting, he withdraws)* It canna be!

ELSPETH Pit doon that window, James. Think o' yer lungs.

JAMES Is this a time to be thinkin' o' lungs? They say the Antelope's no' gear' to play. It's a lee! It's a lee!

ELSPETH Hoots! They can get somebody else.

JAMES [*wailing*] Somebody else! Somebody else!

ELSPETH Naebody is indispensable—so the science chiels say

JAMES [*hysterically*] Whit do the science chiels ken aboot footba'?

SANDIE [*rushing in, up c, hectic with excitement*] It's offeecial—it's offeecial—

JAMES He's no' playin'?

SANDIE No, no! 'The committee's meetin' noo—it's offeecial

[*Rushes towards door, up c*]

JAMES [*detaining him*] Has there been an accident?

SANDIE I dinna ken

[*Rushes out*]

JAMES He ocht to be guarded—he ocht to be watched! Oh, this is beyond belief!

ELSPETH Tak' a Seidlitz powder It'll soothe ye

[*Noise from window*]

JAMES [*opening window, a hubbub*] Whit's that, lads—eh?

SANDIE [*rushing in, up c*] He's comin' up the street!

JAMES The Antelope?

SANDIE There's a crood round him!

[*Rushes out*]

JAMES [*going towards door up c*] He maun play!

ELSPETH [*returning to seat*] Supposin' his mither's deid?

JAMES [*opening door*] It's the Cup Final And his mither deid or alive would never stand in his way [ROY GORDON enters He is a young man about nineteen, and wears a forelock which comes over his brow At the moment he looks grim and determined] Roy! Roy! Is it true?

[*ROY is followed by SANDIE*]

[*Hubbub from street*]

ROY I'm no' playin'

JAMES Guid sales!

ELSPETH Is it yer mither?

ROY My mither's fine, thank 'ee, Mrs Letch

JAMES [*opening window and leaning out*] He's here,

## 82 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

lads! Leave it to me [Shuts window *Addresses ROY*] Ha'e ye had an accident?

ROY No

JAMES Then why are ye no' playin', Roy?

ROY I'm simply no' playin', Mester Leitch

JAMES It's the Cup Final It's the team's one great chance There has never been onything like it since the match o' 1887

ROY It's a free country

JAMES But, gud sakes, lad—

ELSPETH Ye look upset Roy

ROY [his lips quivering] No Mrs Leitch I'm no' upset

JAMES This is a disaster!

ROY They've reserves Andie MacDougall can play centre forward

JAMES [with hearty laughter] Andie MacDougall! Andie MacDougall! [Looks at SANDIE.]

SANDIE [hysterically] Andie MacDougall talks glib enough, but he runs like a crab

JAMES Ha'e ye had a row, Roy?

ROY A row—no

ELSPETH [looking hard at him] Ah, yes, ye ha'e had a row, Roy I can see it in yer face And I can guess fine wha it was wi'

JAMES Tell me, Mither, tell me the name o' the hammer [daring his fists] wha dare pass words wi' the Antelope on this day o' days!

ELSPETH Oh, Feyther, ye're slow o' understandin' Fine do I ken wha's at the bottom o' a' this

JAMES [to ROY] Tell me—

ROY I can deal wi' my ain affaurs my ainsel'—

JAMES [truthfully] His name?

[*There enters JANET LEITCH from door up C. She is a pretty young girl of eighteen of the school-mistress type, more refined than her parents*

*She gives a start on seeing ROY, but her attitude is one of coldness, with a distinct tinge of hauteur*

ELSPETH Eh, Janet, are ye better?

JANET I'm splendid, Mother dear [Nods haughtily to ROY, who draws himself up] What a row outside! What's happened?

JAMES It's the Cup Final

JANET [pretending to be bored] Really!

SANDIE And he's no' playin'—the Antelope's no' playin'!

JANET [quietly, as she takes off gloves] Oh?

[ELSPETH eyes her shrewdly ROY glares at her The hubbub outside is renewed

JAMES The lads are callin' for ye, Roy

ROY [going angrily to window, opening it, and addressing crowd outside] I'm no' playin', I tell ye! I'm no' playin'! I'm feenished with footba'—seenished for good and a'!

[Bangs down window SANDIE emits a wail

JAMES These are awfu' words to hear, awfu'!

ELSPETH [pleasantly to ROY, who is walking up and down the room like a lion, glaring every now and then at JANET, who is trying to look pleasantly cool and detached] Wull ye no' sit doon, Roy?

ROY Thank ye, Mrs Leitch

[Sits down abruptly, left of table

JAMES [quietly, as he stands before him] Now, Roy, lad, I'm an older man than you are, and I played outside right for the Mechanics years before ye were born

ROY [impatiently] I've given ma deceesion

JAMES [persuasively] Let me just pit before ye the following arguments, as judicially as I can Everybody kens—

ELSPETH Wheest, Feyther, it's no' you that can mak' Roy play But I ken somebody that can

JAMES [excitedly] Wha? For the Lord's sake, wumman, tell me instanter! Look at the clock!

SANDIE It's the half 'o'or—the half 'o'or!

ELSPETH [looking slyly at JANET, who, disconcerted, turns away ROY is drumming his hands on the table] It's mair than a footba' match that the lassies ha'e disturbed in their time

JAMES [catching her glance, jumping] What? The lassie? [Stares at JANET, who goes almost to door up R, then at ROY] A horrible suspicion dawns upon me [JANET opens door R., as if going out Peremptorily] Janet! Shut that door

JANET [pretending to be surprised, does so] Yes, Father?

JAMES [severely] Ha'e ye been havin' words wi' the Antelope?

JANET [sweetly] What antelope, dear?

JAMES What antelope! (Points at ROY)

JANET Oh, is that what they call him?

ELSPETH Now, now, Feyther, ye're a handy man at your job, but ye're no' a reconcilin' dove The young folks will make it up in their own guid time

JANET } [simultaneously] No!

ROY } [simultaneously] No!

JAMES [to ELSPETH] Wheest, wumman, this is too serious a matter for you to meddle wi' It's zero hour

[Pontifically, to JANET] Am I to understand—

ROY [jumping up, bawling] It's like this, Mester Leitch She turned me doon! She turned me doon! Ayt, when I asked her she tosses up her nose—

JANET I never toss up my nose

ROY —as if I was a bit o' dirt, aye, and after walkin' oot wi' me and after I took her to a' the matches and to Inverness twice on my new cycle—aye, and to the talkies time after time, forbye takin' her brother as weel—isna that so, Sandie?

SANDIE [tearfully] Aye

ROY Besides, she promised—

JANET I did not

ROY Yes, ye did, and I dinna care if the whole toon—aye, the whole North o' Scotland—kens the reason why I'm no' playin' in the Final [To JANET] It'll be a warnin' to you and the likes o' you for the rest o' your days [Hubbub outside]

JAMES [opening window and shouting] Bide a wee, lads ! Bide a wee ! Keep calm ! Scotland yet !

ELSPETH Shut that window, ye Jack in the-boxes ! What will the neighbours say ? [SANDIE shuts window]

JAMES [solemnly] Just let us be clear on this point [Drawing himself up and addressing JANET] Am I to understand that Mr Roy Gordon has asked you to marry him ?

ROY That I did, and I bought the ring !

JAMES [brushing him aside] And you, my daughter, my only daughter, bone o' my bone and flesh o' my flesh—

ELSPETH Hoots Feyther ! Dinna exaggerate ! Anybody would think ye were the prophet Abraham

JAMES —that my daughter should be demented and perverse enough to refuse him—

ROY Yes, she did

JANET Yes, I did

JAMES Are ye aware what he is ?

SANDIE Read whut the *Record* says about him, read whut the *Record* says

ELSPETH What does the *Record* ken about being crossed in love ?

JAMES Are ye aware that the Antelope is the greatest centre forward the North has had since my ain time ? Are ye aware—

JANET [interrupting] I have no ill will against Mr Gordon I wish him all success in his games, and no

doubt he is all that you say, but [firmly] really I'm not at all interested in football

JAMES. Not interested in footba'! But is yer feyther interested in it, and was his feyther afore him interested in it, and yer uncles?

SANDIE. And me.

ROY. Never mind her, Master Leitch. Her head is too high in the air to see facts.

JAMES. And let me tell you this—that the whole family o' the Leitches—aye, and the whole family o' the Macleans, yer mither a family—wud ha'e considered it a supreme honour to ha'e ye marnet to the Antelope.

JANET. I didn't know you felt so strongly on the subject.

JAMES. And ye refuse him on the eve o' the Final!

JANET. I'm sorry.

JAMES. Sorry! That's what comes o' givin' weemeg the vote—she turns down a champion.

ELSPETH. Why, Janet dear?

JANET. I am not in love with him.

ROY [going up to her, n.] That's no' what ye gave me to understand doon by the burnside in the gloaming the night before I went to Aberdeen!

JANET [sarcastically]. Aberdeen!

ROY. Ye were sonse enough then—when ye laid yer head on my shooder—

SANDIE. Did she, noo?

JANET [indignantly]. Aberdeen!

ROY. Aye, Aberdeen! The nicht afore I went to Aberdeen

ELSPETH. What about Aberdeen?

JANET [angrily]. He never went to Aberdeen.

[SANDIE now begins to show distinct signs of uneasiness  
and gradually shades down into a chair]

ROY. What d'ye say? I did go to Aberdeen.

JANET. Lass.

ROY Lies?

JANET You went to Glasgow

ROY Me at Glesga?

JANET You and your film stars—you and your Stella Girvana!

ROY Stella Girvana?

JAMES Whit's a' this?

ELSPETH Bide a wee, Feyther

JANET [producing a paper] You're in the papers

ROY Papers?

JANET [producing a "Bulletin" from her bag] This was sent to me by one of my kind girl friends

ROY Let's see [Takes paper from her and reads] "Mr Roy Gordon, the brilliant Mechanics centre-forward, known to the football world as 'the Antelope,' arrived in Glasgow yesterday and presented to the famous film star Stella Girvana a beautiful bouquet of flowers on behalf of her countless admirers in the North" [Amazed, goes on reading] "Subsequently the Antelope and Miss Girvana toured the various halls where her film, *Desires of Paradise*, is being shown, and had a rapturous reception everywhere Picture on page ten"

[He stares like one entranced

JANET Look at the picture

[ELSPETH rises and has a look at paper, so does

JAMES

ROY I was never in Glesga

[SANDIE has a sly look at the picture, and then sinks

back into chair His mother's eye is upon him

JAMES Let's see

[JAMES and JANET crowd round ROY as he hurriedly turns the pages

ROY That's no' me

JAMES It's yer pow, anyway I wud ken that curl anywhere What's that at the bottom?

## 58 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

JANET [still unconvinced, reading] "The Antelope entertaining Stella Gurvana to supper at the Blue Dragon Night Club."

ROY [reading] "The Antelope, it seems, has a prejudice against the cameras, but our photographer was lucky enough to secure this exclusive snap of the happy pair" [Wiping his forehead] This is libel o' a most desperate kind.

JANET [almost breaking down] Oh, Roy, is it no' you?

ROY Of course it isna me.

[ELSPETH has a good look at the paper, but says nothing]

JAMES There's some dirty work gain' on. Let's see

[The three resume their examination of the paper]

ELSPETH [C., addressing SANDIE in severe tones] Alexander Sinclair Smeaton Leitch!

JAMES [looking up] Eh?

ELSPETH Just a sneeze.

[Stands majestically from room up a

JAMES [to SANDIE, who has risen and gone D.L.] Do you tell anything about this?

SANDIE [terrified] No—no, Feyther!

JANET [beginning to melt] Now that I look on it, it's no' you, Roy

ROY Of course it isna me! It's a matter for the police. This is criminal.

[SANDIE groans]

JAMES To be sure

JANET Oh, Roy!

ROY [excitatively] Janet, my Janet!

[He is about to embrace her]

[ELSPETH re-enters. She carries in her hand a pardonable imitation of the Antelope's curl. She holds it aloft and sternly addresses SANDIE, who slinks to the wall.]

ELSPETH Alexander!

ROY What's that? \*

ELSPETH [to JAMES] I found this heathenish contraption in yer son's drawer this mornin' I wondered what it could be

JAMES [holding up the curl] It's hair

ELSPETH Aye, and what is it an eemetaion o'?

JAMES [looking at it, then at ROY] Guid Lord!

ROY [amazed] My certy! What does this mean?

[JANET laughs hysterically]

ELSPETH [to SANDIE] Did ye go, as ye said ye were gaun', to spend the week end wi' yer Aunt Annie at Mutton Hole?

SANDIE [almost whimpering] No—Mither!

ELSPETH Did ye go to Glesga instead?

SANDIE Aye, Mither

JAMES Glesga!

ROY Glesga!

ELSPETH Did ye pretend to be Roy?

JAMES Mercy on me!

ELSPETH Did ye?

SANDIE Aye, Mither

JANET Sandie!

ROY Ye young de il!

JAMES D'ye mean to tell me that ye—impersonated the Antelope?

SANDIE It was just for fun, Feyther

ROY Fun!

JAMES Ye'll live tae be hangit

JANET Sandie, Sandie, why did ye do it?

SANDIE [almost weeping] I dinna ken

ELSPETH I ken Ye've got them talkies on the brain, and ye think o' naethun' else but them bold besoms wi' their bare backs and rollin' een The lad that frequents the talkies is in danger o' hell fire That's what the revival preacher said last Sabbath, and little did I think it would apply to my ain son. Stella Gurvana!

90 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

JAMES [secretly] Explain! [Silence] D'ye hear?

SANDIE I wan'ed to speak to Stella Gurrina

ELSPETH And that's my bairn!

SANDIE And I couldna see her unless I was a celebrity

ROY So you said you were me?

SANDIE Aye

JAMES Ye introduced yersel' as the Antelope?

SANDIE Aye

ELSPETH And spent a fine lot o' silver, I'll be bound.

SANDIE Aye

JAMES Where did ye get the silver?

SANDIE It's ma ain' Oot o' the Savings Bank.

ELSPETH Oh, me, the day!

JAMES [excitedly] Is that why ye wouldest marry him, Janet?

JANET [disturbed] Well, I didn't like that picture, and he said he was going to Aberdeen, [almost crying] and I thought he was deceiving me.

ROY Janet, ma dearie!

[He rushes to her, but she shoves him and goes to R.

ELSPETH [secretly to SANDIE, as she seats herself] Ye see it Supposin' that Roy had cut his throat? You would ha'e been hanged. [Hubbub outside]

JAMES [excitedly throwing open window L.C.] Durna despair, lads There's hope yet. Up, the Mechanics!

[Cheers outside He pulls down window]

ROY [going up to JANET and taking her in his arms] Janet, my dearie! Oh, when ye turned me down, lassie, so cold and cruel after your kindly words doon by the burn-side—oh, I thocht my heart would break.

JANET Oh, Roy! Roy! Didn'a I cry?

JAMES [smirked] Ye'll play in the match?

ROY [ignoring JAMES] If ye had only told me, my pretty one! But to spurn me—oh, I wished I were dead.

JAMES [*dancing round them*] Ye'll just do it Into yer shorts ! I'll help ye to change

ROY Janet, my dearie ! Oh, my lovely wild rose !

JANET [*in his arms*] Oh, when I saw that paper, Roy, everything became black

JAMES Come awa' ! Come awa' ! [Runs to window

ROY Janet ! [Kisses her

JAMES [*to crowd*] He's comin', lads ! [A yell

JANET After what ye said at the burnside, and askin' me to marry you and me so happy, and then to see that picture—

JAMES Never mind them havers the noo !

ROY Oh, Janet, it's worth the sorrow to ha'e ye in my arms, and niver again—

JAMES It's ten to three

ELSPETH [*wiping her eyes*] Wheest, Feyther ! It's lovely to hear them It reminds me o' when ye coorted me yersel', and ca'd me the lily o' Blervie

ROY —and niver, niver again will I let ye go, niver again as long as life will last !

JAMES [*showing them both to door*] The kick-off's at three thirty

JANET You'll have to play

ROY Vera weel—and I'll play as I niver played afore

JAMES [*ecstatically, and dancing a Highland Fling*] Hoorah ! Hoorah !

SANDIE [*recovering, and going to window*] He's comin'—

[ROY and JANET have got to door up C, and go out arm-in-arm JAMES follows them SANDIE follows JAMES

JAMES [*turning round; sternly*] Where are ye gaun' ?

SANDIE The match, Feyther

JAMES Sit doon by yer mither and read yer Bible Wait till I return

92 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SANDIE. Am I no' goin' tae the Final?

JAMES. Of a surety, no. I'll deal wi' you when I come back.

SANDIE *{almost screaming}* Feyther!

ELSPETH *{rushing and shutting window}* Now, now, Sandie! Remember ye might be in prison instead o' ha'ein' a cup o' tea here wi' yer mither.

SANDIE. I dinna want a cup o' tea wi' my mither.

JAMES *{half relenting}* But if ye behave yourself' maybe on my return I'll describe to you the play.

*[Goes out majestically]* ELSPETH sits down. An object of despair, SANDIE sits down beside her.

ELSPETH *{looking to see if door is closed, then straightily, to SANDIE}* Sandie! *{He looks up at her}* Sandie, what's a centre forward?

*[He stares at her, pitying himself that for the next two hours he has to put up with such ignorant company. There are cheers and yells from the front door]* The curtain falls.

THE WANDERER  
*A Costume Play*  
By AUBERON KENNARD

CHARACTERS

ANNE CARVELL  
JANET CARVELL  
SERGEANT PRAISE-GOD  
BAREBONES  
THE WANDERER

## THE WANDERER<sup>1</sup>

*The scene is laid in the parlour of a small country house. The time : a winter's evening in 1650. There is an ordinary door D L almost exactly opposite the fireplace D R. Cupboard door up R. The secret door is prominently situated up C. The furniture includes a large table between C and L C, with a chair (1) on the right of it, facing the audience. A second chair (2) also facing the audience stands near the fireplace D R. A smaller chair (4) is set on the left of the table. The upper portion of the secret door should be covered by a picture and the lower portion by means of a large chair (3). Other furniture should be upon the stage to make the room appear more comfortable.*

*ANNE is discovered behind the table, and facing the audience, preparing it for supper*

ANNE [calling] Janet! Janet!

JANET [off-stage] Coming, sister! [Entering L] Oh, I am ever late, but from my easement this moment have I seen a pair of those cruel horsemen riding over the hill, and I must needs watch them out of sight

ANNE [coming down to R of chair 1] Why, then, little coward, they will not harm you! They fly at nobler game than two poor maids in a humble cottage. [Sitting in chair] Besides, on such a bitter night I'll warrant

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they think more of a tavern fireside than of those poor fugitives they are sworn to hunt. Why, dear one, your hair is all wet.

JANET *[going over to fireplace]* Yes, Anne. Only a hand's breadth did I open my window, but the rain beat in upon me and I could scarce close it. *[Lowering her head towards the fire and fluffing out her hair]* Oh, sister, it is a terrible night.

ANNE Aye, truly. And I pray God there is one wanderer who finds a shelter this night but half as warm as our hearts, that ever cherish his memory.

JANET *[looking round towards ANNE]* A wanderer? Whom mean you? Not—not—

ANNE *[looking scornfully round]* Hush Janet! You know our father bade us never mention his dear name, though in our hearts he reigns. Ah, he reigns, indeed.

JANET Nay, sister, but too often have you chid me for speaking of the—of him. What hath he done that his name should never pass our lips save in secret? *[Coming to and kneeling at ANNE's knee, on her right side]* I want no food to-night. I fear the storm. Anne tell me the tale, I pray you.

ANNE. Little sister, do you remember three long years agone, when we sojourned at Oxford with Old Uncle Martin in his house hard by the river under the great grey tower?

JANET Methinks I do but dimly. *[Sitting back on her heels]* Was it not there I plucked the daisies and threw them to the ducks, and laughed to see them clatter up in hope of a feast?

ANNE. The same. Ah child, you were ever a tease. Well, one day as I looked from my window where I helped old Martha dry the herbs we had gathered I spied a noble concourse of horsemen passing over the bridge. In fear I hid behind my curtain to see them go.

hy In their great boots and feathered hats and jingling trappings they danced along the cobbled street A brave show, child! But there was one face, nigh the last of them he rode, which I have yet before mine eyes Dark he was, with shrewd, bright eyes that looked about him as though ever seeking a new jest As he passed all heads were bared, and on all lips I heard ' The Prince ! God save him ! ' [She pauses, looking into the past] And I—fond little fool—I leaned out far from my window and flung straight at his face the bunch of rosemary that I held And at the flash of my hand he looked up and caught the posy as it fell, and carried it to his lips " Rosemary for remembrance " I quoth he, and gazed full in mine eyes with a look which—[hides her face on JANET's head]—which haunts me yet That night I dreamed of him, Janet He came to me, tired, pale, and wet, and sought my help [She rises] He—sought my help And as I yearned to give it and pressed him with eager questions—I awoke, and wept Even then the storm was brewing, and two years later, when we were but newly come hither from town, the cruel Parliament slew the King, his father, and drove him to wander, homeless and friendless, through the land that should be his kingdom, a price upon his head

JANET And he wanders still, they say [Standing up] Wby, only yester-eve Juliet, the serving-maid, had news of ber brother, who rides with Monk, that they were to scour the woods near Salisbury, where he had been seen

ANNE Near Salisbury? Then he may be near Clarendon itself The woods are deep, and through them he might pass to the coast Oh, Janet, if it should be! Stay, did you not say two horsemen passed before the house a while ago?

JANET Yes, truly, and one of them was Sergeant Barebones

## 100 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

WANDERER [*laying his hands on her shoulders as he goes into her face*] "Rosemary for remembrance"! Why, dear soul, I keep your posy yet [Takes it from his pocket] So our paths have crossed again Is it to b- the lion and the mouse once more? The lion is fast bound with cords which it may take more than the mouse a dainty teeth to gnaw asunder, methinks [Turns to the fire again]

ANNE [Thinking a moment, then running up-stage] Ah, but the mouse hath a hole which may fit even the lion [She takes down the picture, jumping on chair No 3 to do so, then quickly pushes the chair away] See, my liege! [Knocks open the door] If the hunters come for their prey here at least they will never seek I'm

WANDERER [Laughing heartily and going up stage to peer inside] A dainty chamber for a king, forsooth, but I have lain in worse Is it warm and dry?

ANNE In truth it is or should be Here my father kept his stores of weed which first Sir Walter Raleigh brought from far Virginia. He was wont to burn it in a tube of clay and suck the smoke A searsome sight it was But no need to bide herein until they seek you There is always time [Enter JANET in great alarm] Why, Janet?

JANET Anne! Anne! The soldiers! They are even now at the door [Knocking heard in the distance]

WANDERER. Oddsbodikins! The game begins, then [He passes through the secret door ANNE bundles his hat and cloak in after him, and as she replaces the chair and the picture she speaks] Janet, forget you ever saw our guest. He is not here, he's gone! Dear lord, are you bestowed aight? Go, Janet, go! Delay will make them wonder Let them in! But stay! How many are there?

JANET Half a score, and Barebones at their head

ANNE. Barebones, ah! I will see him. [Knocking outside] Haste, child, and bid the rest respect our privacy

[Exit JANET]

[ANNE stands a moment, eyes closed in prayer, then sits at table in chair No 1 and sews calmly

[Enter BAREBONES, who strides across to R C, followed by JANET, who stays by the door]

JANET I tell you, sir, there is no one in the house save my sister and myself and our little maid, who, as you saw, is half distraught with terror at your coming, and no wonder, for—

ANNE [standing up] Peace, sister Sir, I bid you welcome to our humble home The night is wet and cold Will you not

[Signs to JANET to give him some refreshment  
JANET goes to cupboard up R]

BAREBONES [hats hat on] All women are evil, saith the Lord, but they that babble overmuch are a weariness unto the flesh

ANNE [sweetly] Methinks your head at least would grow less weary, Sergeant, if it were lightened of its heavy load [BAREBONES sulkily removes his steel helmet] What may I do to help you?

BAREBONES Praise God Barebones needeth not the help of women to do the works of the Lord I am come to seek out the accursed one, the man Charles Stuart, whom we have tracked even to this abode of darkness Lo, the Lord hath even now delivered him into my band [Holds out his hand without looking at it, and JANET, coming forward on his left side, timidly places a mug in it He looks at the mug and the girls alternately, then drinks, and hands mug to JANET] A little wine for thy stomach's sake [Moving R] Where is that evil spirit that I seek?

JANET [looking into his mug] It is all spent, good Sergeant, but I have more in the jack

BAREBONES [turning to her and speaking angrily] Thou

saucy baggage, trifle not with me! [To ANNE] Where cowers that black-visaged mountebank? Speak, or this house shall burn about thine ears like Sodom and Gomorrah!

ANNE. Hold, Master Barebones, while I think "Black-visaged," did you say?

BAREBONES [moving up-stage and looking into cupboard] Aye, black as his soul

ANNE [to JANET]. Janet, my love, what of that beggar-man with fierce, dark eyes and falling raven hair who came—

JANET [excitedly]. Yes, I remember! As we barred the door at twilight did he come, and stood awhile as though to beg for alms, then changed his bent, and strode amid the bracken

BAREBONES. Ha, it might be he! Towards the south he sped?

ANNE } [together, after exchanging a quick glance] Nay,  
JANET } to the north

ANNE [hastily adding]. Methought he set his course for Andover or Grately

BAREBONES [striding across the stage towards the door] It is well. The net draws in, and the fish is yet within it. Woe unto the accursed man! The hand of the Lord shall smite him hip and thigh [Opening door and shouting to his men] To horse! We ride for Grately

[ANNE stands looking at him, hands on breast. JANET drops him a low curtsy behind his back and puts her tongue out]

BAREBONES [turning suddenly in the doorway] There are some seasons when a woman's tongue is well employed.

ANNE. We thank you, sir. Farewell!

[Exit BAREBONES, leaving door open  
[The sound of the outside door being opened is heard  
Then the door is slammed. After a pause they both run to the door and listen. JANET shuts the

door Then ANNE runs to the secret door and, after taking down the picture and pushing aside the chair, opens it, helping out the WANDERER. JANET remains up L

[ANNE then moves towards chair No 2

WANDERER [C] Oddsfish, fair mistress, is the audience ended? [Dusts himself and puffs with relief] A murrain on this cramp! [Stretches himself] "There are some seasons when a woman's tongue—" [Laughs loudly, then as ANNE suddenly sinks in chair No 2 and sobs wildly he comes to her] There, there, dear maid! He little knows what work that tongue has done [While he speaks JANET gets his cloak and hat from the secret room] Be comforted Charles may forget his enemies sometimes, but never will forget his friends Heaven bless your wits which spurred them northward! Now within the hour I'll put that cursed road behind me and be safe

[Takes his hat and cloak from JANET.

ANNE [rising and moving C] Aye, go, my liege I fear they may return Oh, I will pray and pray—two prayers this night That you escape them, and—

[JANET, with a meaning look, tiptoes to door and exits WANDERER. What more, dear heart? [She hesitates] I have no woman's wit, yet can I guess [He comes to her] God grant the first prayer Can I grant the second? [She bows her head low, and he takes her hand] I'll not forget you [She kisses his hand He turns, as if to go, and she sinks on one knee He takes from his breast the bunch of faded rosemary, turns towards her, and touches her lightly with it on each shoulder, saying] Rosemary for remembrance.

[As she raises her face he kisses her on the brow, and goes quickly out ANNE remains kneeling and looking after him

# THE GOLDEN MEAN

By A E M BAYLISS and J C BAYLISS

## CHARACTERS

JORIS THE THIRTEENTH *King of Joonia*

QUEEN PAULA, *his wife*

PRINCESS TAMAR, *his sister*

PRINCE GEORGIO *his half brother, generally  
regarded as the fool of the Royal Family*

GENERAL MUSTACHIO *Commander in Chief  
of the Joonian Army*

CARDINAL CARMINE

TWO ANNOUNCERS

A SERVANT

## HINTS FOR THE PRODUCER

KING JORIS may be regarded as a weak imitation of Henry VIII. He is short and decidedly rotund and has taken to vegetarianism in the hope of reducing his weight. He is slightly bald, but possesses a reddish beard of the spade variety. His demeanour is a mixture of fussy dignity and childish irritability.

GRORIO is of course, by no means the fool he pretends to be. He should be nonchalant and sardonic, and may wear a monocle if desired.

GENERAL MUSTACCHIO is a choleric, elderly soldier of the old school, with more hair than brains. He should possess long grey moustaches, pointed at the ends, which he twirls constantly.

The CARDINAL should be a suave, slightly foxy looking person, clean shaven, and of much slighter build than the King.

Of the two ladies the QUEEN is the more subtle, PRINCESS TAMAR the more vigorous character.

# THE GOLDEN MEAN<sup>1</sup>

## SCENE I

*A Council Chamber in the Palace. It is mid morning.* KING JORIS sits at the head of the table, C, with the CARDINAL on his right and the GENERAL on his left. PRINCE GEORGIO stands with his back to the fire, up C, idly playing with a piece of string. There is one exit, R.C.

KING And do you really mean to say that our cousin Serge of Sergovia called me, King Joris the Thirteenth of Jovnia, a caroty-faced cabbage-eater?

CARDINAL Yes, I assure your Majesty, those were his very words.

GENERAL Colossal impudence! Intolerable!

[Blows his nose vigorously]

KING It's true that I've recently embraced the noble principles of vegetarianism.

GEORGIO More's the pity. You want something to put beef into you.

KING [waving GEORGIO's words aside] But a caroty-faced cabbage-eater! Really . . . I mean to say . . .

CARDINAL Furthermore, after some allusion—the precise significance of which I must confess eludes me—to bats in the belfry be added that you came of a family of dunderheads, imbeciles, and half wits.

GEORGIO That's where I come in. Not that I bear malice, of course. It's pretty common knowledge that I'm the fool of the family.

<sup>1</sup> Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs George G. Harrap and Co., Ltd., 182 High Holborn London W.C.1

CARDINAL. Finally——

GEORGIO Don't forget to add "brethren"

KING You don't mean to say there's any more?

CARDINAL. Certainly. Unfortunately—or, rather, fortunately for your Majesty's ears—I cannot remember it all.

KING Go on, go on! Let us hear the worst.

CARDINAL. That is just the part I cannot remember. However, to the best of my recollection he concluded by referring to you as a bulbous nosed, bulbulous old blackguard.

GENERAL. [horror struck] Your Majesty!

KING It's an infamous lie! Me bulbulous? I never drink anything stronger than tea.

GEORGIO Unless it's coffee. My drink's cocoa, of course.

KING And every one knows that anyone's nose may become red through dyspepsia. I don't mind a little honest abuse, but this is the limit. [Loathing himself into a rage] I'm the most inoffensive soul alive if I'm left alone, but if that pestilential pup thinks I'm going to stand this lying down . . . Why, the man's the ugliest monarch in Central Europe! A wart hog could give him points in personal beauty. He's a blot on the face of the earth, a worm, a slug, a cockroach, a——

GEORGIO What a pity you didn't learn more natural history, my dear Joris! Your ignorance of fauna cramps your style.

GENERAL. Tchah! [Twirls his moustaches furiously]

KING Don't interrupt! You'll make me angry, and I want to deal with this business calmly and dispassionately. A 'bulbulous old blackguard,' eh? "Bulbous-nosed," am I? May the miserable little skunk be run over at a pedestrian crossing!

GEORGIO Don't be harsh, Joris. Be content to wish his wireless valves to burn out, or something of that kind.

GENERAL. Tchah !

GEORGIO What, again, General ?

KING [shouting] Don't interrupt me, I say ! How can—

CARDINAL I have just remembered a further item

KING Out with it ! Some one is going to pay for this !

CARDINAL I must warn you that it is somewhat offensive

KING Of course it's offensive ! Didn't that miserable rat Serge say it ?

CARDINAL He declared that your Army was a back number, that your generals were all decrepit old fossils and that *you*, Joris the Thirteenth of Jovnia, were a disgrace to any military tailor

KING Ten thousand maledictions ! Shall the fellow say all this and live ?

GENERAL An insult sure, to be wiped out in blood

GEORGIO Gore, General, gore A much more poetical word

KING Enough ! No more trifling ! [Bangs his fist on the table] General Mustachio !

GENERAL [standing up and saluting] Sure ?

KING How soon can you be ready for war ?

GENERAL [sitting down lumpy] Not for a month at least

GEORGIO Optimist !

KING A month ? Do you expect me to wait a month for revenge on that blob, that excrescence, that—

[He chokes with anger

GEORGIO Loosen your collar, Joris It will relieve your choler Ha, ha !

KING This is no time for joking I demand immediate satisfaction !

CARDINAL [soothingly] Far be it from me to discourage your Majesty from any noble and worthy enterprise, but could not this little matter be settled by arbitration ?

110 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

KING Little matter, indeed !

CARDINAL [proceeding *raspberry*] Why not refer it to the International Peace Council ?

GENERAL Peace—pah !

GEORGIO You wouldn't have to wait more than three years

KING Perish your peace ! Away with your arbitration ! That's the worst of you Cardinals always trying to wriggle out of *doing* things. The country is full of gas-bags already. Give me deeds, not words.

GEORGIO There speaks a man of action. Newspapers, please copy.

CARDINAL I am no lover of extremes, your Majesty. There is always a golden mean, as the Greeks—

KING Don't quote Greek to me ! I know you. You think if I'm kept waiting long enough my temper—er—that is, my righteous anger—will abate.

GEORGIO Call it temper and leave it at that.

KING [exasperated] Oh, call it what you like ! The fact remains. My blood is up, I tell you. When I think of that miserable little lump of putty having the audacity to insult me to my face—

GEORGIO I thought it was behind your back.

KING Well, wherever it was. I repeat, I must have my revenge quickly, or—

GEORGIO You'll forget.

GENERAL Forget such an insult ? Never !

KING Then think of something, can't you ? What are you here for ? Must I use threats to stir your addled brains ?

GEORGIO Come rack, come rope ! The dungeon awaits. Is the gibbet in working order, I wonder ? [He playfully loops the piece of string round his own neck and draws it tight] Dear, dear, such a pity !

[The GENERAL glares at GEORGIO, splutters, and

*begins to speak, but thinks better of it, and subsides, muttering incoherently and biting his moustaches*

CARDINAL Would your Majesty consider the—er—feasibility of fighting your royal cousin in single combat?

GEORGIO A brilliant suggestion! My friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer would be thrilled. You could charge admission and pay off the National Debt. Bravo, Cardinal!

QUEEN [who has entered unnoticed] What's all this nonsense about single combat? You're to do nothing of the kind, Joris. It's so hopelessly out of date. Be progressive, be modern! [The gentlemen all stand

KING I wouldn't dream of going near the scum, let alone fighting him in a duel. Sit down, my dear. I'm tired!

[The QUEEN sits on a chair next to the CARDINAL, and the gentlemen resume their seats:

GGENERAL. Ahem! As an old soldier and a Conservative, I must confess there is a glamour about the idea that appeals to me. It would be a great opportunity—ahem—to raise our prestige among the nations. Unfortunately, however . . . [Blows his nose violently]

GEORGIO Joris might lose, and that would be deuced awkward.

CARDINAL Does anyone here doubt his Majesty's prowess with sword, pistol, or—

GEORGIO Machine-gun? Oh, no!

QUEEN I won't have it, Joris. Remember your lumbago. If you must have satisfaction let the Army do the fighting.

KING That's what I said, my dear. But the General says it will take a month to mobilize. A month, mind you!

GEORGIO [musingly] Of course, single combat would be cheaper Ah, well, I must go and have my cocoa

[He goes out, twirling his piece of string

GENERAL Cocoa ! [Smiles with disgust

KING A good wholesome beverage, General That reminds me, we might adopt it for the Army

GENERAL Heaven forbid ! They'd mutiny at once

CARDINAL Shall we return to our muttons—er—that is, to the subject under discussion ?

QUEEN Well, whatever you do, you are not to fight, Joris I won't have it. Black never did suit me.

KING Trust me, my love

QUEEN As a parting suggestion, I don't see why you shouldn't nominate a champion to defend your honour if you must proceed with this silly business It would certainly be cheaper than a long war Things are so expensive just now

[She sneeps out, the GENERAL gallantly escorting her to the door

KING Not a bad idea ! What do you say, General ?

GENERAL [returning his seat] Excellent, your Majesty ! Save a lot of bother

KING Of course, I'd prefer a war, personally After all, what do we pay our Army for ?

GEORGIO [entering suddenly] Ha, ha ! Pay ? They haven't been paid for years.

GENERAL Ahem ! Ahem ! To return to her Majesty's suggestion, sir, I have a proposal to make

KING Go on !

GENERAL Your champion must obviously be a noble personage ?

KING Certainly

GENERAL And preferably—of royal blood ?

KING Yes, yes, not too royal, perhaps, but certainly noble.

GENERAL Then I think our friend the Cardinal will be eminently suitable

CARDINAL Preposterous!

GENERAL I don't see it. If I remember rightly, history provides us with famous examples of the—er—Church Militant. Churchmen have fought nobly in the days of old—for a noble cause—and if this is not a noble cause, what is?

KING Well argued, General! You are no doubt thinking of Odo, the brother of William the Conqueror.

GENERAL Er—I— Yes, your Majesty, he'll do as an example.

GEORGIO Now, Cardinal, here's your chance.

CARDINAL No, much as I would like the honour, I must let the General have it. His merit is greater than mine.

GENERAL Not at all, not at all!

CARDINAL Pardon me, my dear General. I would not dream of depriving you of the honour. First of all, you are—presumably—of noble blood, being a sort of second cousin of her Majesty the Queen.

GENERAL What—why—

CARDINAL Secondly, as the first soldier of the realm, your reputation is at stake.

GENERAL My reputation, sir? Who dares to cast aspersions on my reputation?

GEORGIO The fact is, my dear Joris, neither of them has the courage to volunteer. You'd better choose me.

KING You? You don't know a sword from a shovel!

GEORGIO You forget I was once a Colonel of your household cavalry.

GENERAL [bitterly] Yes, once!

KING Oh, I'm tired of all this talk! If none of you can think of a scheme I'll—

GEORGIO I've got one—a good one!

## 114 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

ALL What?

GEORGIO Guess

KING For goodness' sake out with it! I want my lunch

GEORGIO A football match.

GENERAL Absurd!

CARDINAL Ridiculous!

KING No, it isn't. My dear Georgio, you are not such a fool as you look. It's a very good idea

GEORGIO My first born. I'm proud of it

GENERAL [grudgingly] Well, well, it won't cost much

CARDINAL And it won't last long

KING Shall it be Rugby or Association?

GEORGIO Oh, Rugby, of course. Anything can happen at Rugby

KING [brightening up] I don't care what happens so long as I win.

CARDINAL My acquaintance with the game is slight but I presume it allows of a certain amount of strategy?

GENERAL Certainly, certainly!

CARDINAL Then it seems to me that the General could easily arrange for the enemy's goal to be undermined with explosives

CARDINAL Ah, leave that to me! [Rubbs his hands] Nothing like dynamite!

GEORGIO Which are the enemy's goal posts?

GENERAL Those at the other end, of course

GEORGIO Oh, quite! Still, one can hardly guarantee beforehand which is the other end.

CARDINAL Will some one explain? I am at a loss—

KING In football, my dear Cardinal, the rival captains toss for the choice of ends just before the game commences

GENERAL H'm, I'd forgotten that. Confound it!

CARDINAL [reflectively] I suppose a cow with two

heads or two tails could be specially minted for the occasion?

GEORGIO You shock me, Cardinal!

KING Anyhow, that's no use. Our captain would toss and the other would call. If we used a double headed coin and the enemy called "Heads" where should we be?

GENERAL. He might still choose the dangerous half of the field

KING So he might. All the same, we want to be sure.

GEORGIA Don't forget the teams change over at half time

CARDINAL Dear, dear! How involved! I thought it was a simple game

GENERAL Give me a war. I know where I am.

KING I offered you war

GENERAL Er—rumph! *[Blows his nose again]*

CARDINAL It seems to me we must play fair after all.

GEORGIO Most distressing!

CARDINAL Unless we could bribe the referee

KING No hope of that. You don't suppose that suspicious little rat Serge would consent to any referee other than a strictly neutral ambassador appointed by the International Peace Council? Probably some American

GENERAL. Then what's to be done?

GEORGIO If you must win—

KING Of course we must win!

GEORGIO Then you had better have the Air Force in readiness, so that if you lose the match you can still win the day

CARDINAL. All's fair in love and war

KING A good idea! General Mustachio!

GENERAL *[standing up and saluting]* Sire?

KING I have the whole of the Air Force ready for the day

GENERAL. Very good, sure. What day?

KING. I hadn't thought about that. What is to-day?

CARDINAL. March the twenty-eighth

GEORGIO. I suggest April the first as the ideal date

KING. I agree. General, I leave all the arrangements to you

GENERAL. Thank you, sure

KING. And if anything goes wrong

{GEORGIO loops the string round his neck again and makes a sound suggestive of choking

GENERAL. G-r-r-r!

GEORGIO. Hurrah! *Vive le sport!*

CURTAIN

## SCENE II

A drawing room in KING JORIS's palace. Wireless set L.C. Door R.C. Settee and easy-chairs at convenient angles to fireplace, up C. The KING, PRINCE GEORGIO, the GENERAL, and the CARDINAL are listening in to a running commentary on the football match between JOVNAIA and SERGOVIA. It is a little after 4 P.M. on April 1. As in Scene I, GEORGIO stands with his back to the fire, while the rest sit. The running commentary is given by TWO ANNOUNCERS

KING. This would happen on a day like this!

GEORGIO. April the first, you observe

KING. Why can't the fools do something? Every time I listen in to something really important the wireless goes wrong

CARDINAL. What is the technical explanation?

KING. To blazes with technical explanations! Shoot the chief engineer!

GENERAL Hear, hear!

[*The wireless gives a preliminary crackle, and the voice of the FIRST ANNOUNCER is heard*

FIRST ANNOUNCER I must apologize for the temporary—

KING Get on with it! The news!

FIRST ANNOUNCER We can now resume our commentary on the world famous match between Jovnia and Sergovia. The half time score, you will remember, was two—one, in favour of Jovnia. Since then no goal has been scored.

SECOND ANNOUNCER Square two

FIRST ANNOUNCER The excitement is simply extraordinary. I have never witnessed such enthusiasm. Ah, here comes the Sergovian centre forward.

SECOND ANNOUNCER Square seven

GENERAL Ah! [*He twirls his moustaches in agony*

FIRST ANNOUNCER He has passed the home left back. Shoot, man, shoot!

KING Trip him up, somebody!

GEORGIO I'm surprised at you, Joris!

FIRST ANNOUNCER He's going to shoot! The goal-keeper rushes out.

GENERAL Oh! Oh!

[*Clutches his throat*

FIRST ANNOUNCER [*wailing*] I can't see what's happened. Was that a goal?

SECOND ANNOUNCER No. Hit the crossbar. The ball's in play again.

KING Ah, that's better!

FIRST ANNOUNCER Yes, I see now. The right back has cleared and put the ball safely into touch. Throw in.

CARDINAL So this is Rugby? Well, well!

KING [*irritably*] Nothing of the sort! Sergovia insisted on Soccer. Just the kind of thing you might expect from—

118 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

CARDINAL But I thought—

KING Then don't think Listen !

FIRST ANNOUNCER Another Sergovian is being carried off the field

SECOND ANNOUNCER That's the fourth

KING Splendid work ! Keep it up, Jovnia !

*[Stands up in his excitement]*

GENERAL Hear, hear ! Lay 'em all out !

FIRST ANNOUNCER Hello, what's happening over there ? It looks as if one of the Jovian halves is injured. He's writhing on the ground

SECOND ANNOUNCER Square four

GENERAL Why can't these Sergovian brutes play the game ?

FIRST ANNOUNCER Yes, they're bringing a stretcher I'm afraid he's out of it

KING What's the referee doing ? He ought to be suspended

*[Clenches his fist]*

GEORGIO On a rope, of course

SECOND ANNOUNCER Sergovia is pressing. The left winger has put in a lovely centre right in front of goal

Oh !

FIRST ANNOUNCER A palpable foul. Has the referee seen it ? Yes, he's awarded a penalty

SECOND ANNOUNCER Square—

GENERAL I'll shoot the man myself

FIRST ANNOUNCER Who's taking it ?

SECOND ANNOUNCER The Sergovian captain

*[Tense silence]*

FIRST ANNOUNCER He's just going to shoot. He shoots !

He's

KING *[dancing with rage]* Ten thousand maledictions !

*[Strides up and down the room with his hands behind his back.]*

GEORGIO Keep calm, Felix

KING Calm, indeed ! What do you take me for ? Here we are at the most critical moment of your nation's history and— Oh I shall go mad ! [Tears his hair

GENERAL This suspense is awful !

[Gnaws his moustaches furiously

CARDINAL You should have gone to see the game, General

GENERAL What, in weather like this ? It's raining cats and dogs Grr !

GEORGIO You must really take something for your throat, General You seem very choky Anticipation, perhaps

[He produces his piece of string and makes a noose, which he dangles playfully in front of the GENERAL'S nose

[There is a sudden commotion outside, and PRINCESS TAMAR with dishevelled hair and wild eyes, rushes in She is waving a newspaper

PRINCESS Where's Georgio ? Where's Joris ? Ah there you are ! What's this I hear about some ridiculous quarrel between you and my darling Serge ?

[Flings herself across the room towards the KING, now standing LC The GENERAL and the CARDINAL rise to their feet

KING Your darling Serge ! That drivelling nuncompoop !

PRINCESS He's not a nuncompoop ! I hate you !

[Stamps her foot

GEORGIO But why your darling Serge, my pet ?

PRINCESS Of course he's my Serge We're engaged !

KING What ? What ? What ? [Crescendo

CARDINAL Dear me !

GEORGIO This is news indeed !

KING I won't have it ! Why wasn't I consulted ? When did this folly begin ? Don't you know—

PRINCESS He proposed last week, if you want to know,

and I accepted him, thinking what a splendid alliance it would make

KING But why—

PRINCESS And then I was laid up with influenza, and never heard about this absurd quarrel till a few minutes ago. What have you been doing?

KING That's it—blame me! It was your precious Serge who started it. He called me a caroty faced cabbage-eater.

PRINCESS Well, so you are. You do eat cabbage—lots of it. And your face is red.

CARDINAL [softly]. With righteous anger

PRINCESS Fiddlesticks! Am I to be deprived of a suitable husband just because you fly into a temper and pick a quarrel? You must stop the war at once and apologize.

GEORGIO But there isn't any war. [Looks at his watch] At least, not yet.

PRINCESS Then get in touch with him at once! Telephone! Quick!

KING It's no use, my dear Tamar. The affair is being settled at this very moment. We are just waiting to hear—

PRINCESS Are you all mad? You told me—Oh, dear, what is happening?

CARDINAL The dispute is being—ahem—amicably settled by means of a football match.

PRINCESS A football match? Whose tomfool idea was this?

GEORGIO Mine.

PRINCESS I might have known. Nobody but you would have thought of such an absurdity.

GEORGIO Thank you, sister—or, rather, half sister. Still, there's one consolation. If we don't win the match by fair means General Mustachio has arranged for us to win it by foul.

GENERAL. I protest—

GEORGIO No reflection on your Air Force, of course

PRINCESS [suddenly going quiet, but looking very dangerous]  
I see You are determined to win at all costs—even at  
the cost of my happiness

KING [feebley] You couldn't be happy with Serge  
Nobody could [Flaring up] Why doesn't that con-  
founded set work?

GEORGIO Let me look at it [Goes to set and examines  
it] Nothing seriously wrong as far as I can see Ah!  
[Goes to electric-light switch near door, R.C., and depresses  
it Nothing happens] Aha! Aha a! Aha a a!

PRINCESS. Don't make that horrid noise, Georgio!  
What is the trouble?

GEORGIO Oh, nothing much The power's failed I  
expect the electric supply corporation have all gone to  
the football match

GENERAL. They ought to be shot It's desertion from  
duty

KING Is there no way of getting news? Ring the bell  
or do something

[The CARDINAL presses a button near fireplace, but  
there is no answer, nobody comes A dead  
silence

GENERAL. Ugh! It's worse than waiting to go over  
the top

CARDINAL. Hark!

QUEEN [entering] Where is everybody? There isn't a  
servant in the whole palace No tea, and I expressly  
ordered tea at four Has the world gone crazy?

GEORGIO No, it's gone to the football match

QUEEN Then I hope it gets influenza [Noticing  
TAMAR] My dear Tamar, you ought to be in bed

PRINCESS. How can I stay in bed while your precious  
husband is having bombs dropped on my poor Serge?

QUEEN Joris, what is the child talking about? Is she out of her wits?

KING Must be if she's going to marry Serge

PRINCESS He's a better man than you, anyhow, and he hates cabbage

GENERAL I shall shoot myself soon if the news doesn't come through

GEORGIO Give the hangman a chance, General

QUEEN I feel faint. [Subsides on settee

KING Water, quick! Brandy, smelling salts, anything!

GENERAL [producing a flask from his pocket] Allow me, your Majesty

CARDINAL Hark!

GEORGIO That's twice you've said that

CARDINAL There's some one coming

GENERAL News at last!

[Drops his flask and turns to door. A man in royal  
livery comes in, panting

KING Quick, man! What's happened?

GENERAL Who won? Speak, can't you?

SERVANT It w-w w-w23—

PRINCESS [clutching her heart] Oh, Serge!

GEORGIO Don't hurry the poor fellow

SERVANT It w w-w23—

CARDINAL [picking up flask and offering it to the man, who takes a huge gulp] Now!

SERVANT It was a—draw!

PRINCESS Saved! Saved!

KING A draw! [Collapses on nearest chair

GEORGIO How pleasant for everybody!

[Throws string into fire

CARDINAL The golden mean!

CURTAIN

# THE SECOND BEST BED

By CYRIL ROBERTS

## CHARACTERS

ANNE SHAKESPEARE

SUSANNAH HALL. } *her daughters*

JUDITH QUINNEY

JEREMY, *her servant*

HENRY WROTHESLEY, *Earl of Southampton*

SIR FRANCIS BACON, *Lord Keeper of England*

SCENE: *The living-room of Anne Hathaway's cottage.*

TIME: *A summer's afternoon, 1616.*

## THE SECOND BEST BED<sup>1</sup>

SCENE. The interior of Anne Hathaway's cottage at Shottery. The living room of the cottage presents substantially the same appearance as it does to day. It is a summer afternoon, and the leaded lattice windows R C are wide open. The door up L C leading to the garden is open. There is another door up R leading to the bed room and kitchen. The furniture consists of a cabinet between a window, up L, and a hooded fireplace D L, a chest, up C, an armchair, L C, two smaller chairs right and left of a table, R C, a fourth chair, D R, and a couple of stools, up L and D L.

When the curtain rises ANNE SHAKESPEARE a grey haired, buxom woman, enters from the inner room up R carrying a bolster and a sheet. She is followed by her elder daughter, SUSANNAH HALL, and her younger daughter, JUDITH QUINET. Beneath her air of pious resignation we may detect a certain sharpness. Her daughters are endeavouring to mollify her.

JUDITH moves down R.

ANNE. Nay, but you shall take the bolster

{Grosses down L C.

SUSANNAH [following to C] But indeed, Mother, I do not wish it—

ANNE [turning] You shall take it, I say. Anne Shakespeare is not the woman to keep stutch or thread she may not lawfully call her own.

<sup>1</sup> Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street Strand, London, W.C.2 or 25 West 45th Street New York

[*Gets up bolster in sheet on stool down L.*

SUSANNAH But, Mother, I have more beds and store of bedding already at New Place than—

ANNE It would be my own daughter to throw her wealth in my face Your ladyship can go back to your fine New Place I wonder you can sleep a wink in comfort under the roof that should by rights be your own mother's.

SUSANNAH [moving above table to her sister] Speak to her, Judith

JUDITH [crossing to C] Mother, you mistake her She wishes you to keep it

ANNE No It is not mine I'll not have it in my house [Moving up and throwing bundle on floor by the door up L C] There, 's all wrapped up to make it easier for carrying [Coming down L C] But I'll thank you, Madam Sue, to let me have the sheet again That at least is mine, from that self same second best bed, with the furniture thereof [Moves away to L.

JUDITH We are not to blame for our father's will, Mother [Crossing L to ANNE] Mother, why be angry?

ANNE There, there, I'm not angry But I am so put about and humiliated I scarce know what I am doing The second best bed—and wittin' too, as an afterthought [JUDITH turns away up C]—I'll warrant all the tongues in Stratford are wagging Anne Shakespeare, widow of the most substantial man in the town, left with naught but a poor beggarly piece of furniture He must have known what folks would think

SUSANNAH Men are not quick to understand these things, Mother

ANNE So you are beginning to know the shortcomings of men, eh? Though John Hall is a steady, solid sort of a man, not like—like— [Sinks into armchair L C.

SUSANNAH Not like our father But he was different from all other men [Crosses L to ANNE.

ANNE Aye, God be praised for that, I'll say, for other women's sake, though I loved him well

SUSANNAH And he loved you too, Mother. He knew the law would give you sufficient of his estate to live on

ANNE A sorry plight I should have been in else! Anne Shakespeare before the overseers of the poor! [Rising] Come, let's talk no more of such things. [Crossing SUSANNAH as she moves up to door] Here is your bundle. Bring the sheet back at your leisure. And be careful of it, for 'tis good linen. Is Jeremy tending Dapple?

SUSANNAH No, Dapple is tethered by the gate

ANNE Then, Judith, call Jeremy in from the orchard [To SUSANNAH] He shall carry your bundle down the path

[Exit JUDITH by the door up L.C.

SUSANNAH But indeed, Mother, there's no need. I can carry it myself

ANNE And have every neighbour see Mrs John Hall, Mr Shakespeare's daughter, carrying her packages like any fishwife? A pretty notion! No, Jeremy shall sling it on Dapple's neck. 'Twill look seemly enough that way, but carry it you shall not. Now go your ways [Moving up to R. of the door up L.C.] I've enough to do making the cherry conserves if that lazy fellow has but finished the plucking of them

SUSANNAH [standing at the door] Let me stay and help you, Mother. [Returns to her mother]

ANNE No, Judith is staying. You must be on your way and get your child to bed betimes. I know you you'll let her stay up to all hours. Young married folk know nothing of children, though they think they can teach their elders everything

[JEREMY, a farm-hand, enters up L.C., followed by JUDITH. He is a likeable, knowing fellow, somewhat prone to presume on his long service to the family, but easily quelled by ANNE's masterful ways]

130 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

can't abide players. It was because of them the master first left her.

SOUTHAMPTON So I have heard. But there were other reasons too, I think?

JEREMY Well, sir, since I see you are well acquainted with affairs, I may confess at once the mistress hath a hellish tongue at times, though a good enough woman in general. A managing disposition in the opposite sex is a sad thing, your worship.

SOUTHAMPTON Your description reminds me of the wife of Bath.

JEREMY Very like, sir, I don't know the lady.

SOUTHAMPTON She was another of the sex who liked to wear the breeches. But they were happy enough together those last years?

JEREMY Oh, syc, sir. It was peaceful enough. It was wonderful to see how the master would manage her.

SOUTHAMPTON Yet, he had learned a good deal of women in the years between.

JEREMY I suppose a man may learn much about women in London, sir?

SOUTHAMPTON As much as he is likely to learn anywhere, and that's little enough. But now, good fellow, entertaining though I find your conversation, you will oblige me by finding your mistress.

JEREMY I go at once, sir. She's in the orchard, no doubt.

(Exit up L.C. SOUTHAMPTON makes himself at ease in the armchair L.C., fumming to himself "Sigh no more, ladies," etc., when a shadow falling across the doorway up L.C. makes him look up. SIR FRANCIS BACON, Lord Keeper, soon to be Lord Chancellor, stands in the doorway. He is soberly but richly dressed. His face, in spite of the warmth of the day, is partly concealed by the

*high collar of his cloak and by a scarf* SOUTH-  
AMPTON *peers at him closely*

SOUTHAMPTON [L.C.] Angels and Ministers of Grace, defend us!

BACON [moving down c] Your pardon, sir, but am I right in believing this to be the residence of Mistress Shakespeare?

SOUTHAMPTON Assuredly you are right, my Lord Keeper

BACON You have the advantage of me, sir

SOUTHAMPTON Come, come, Sir Francis, we *last* met but a week ago, and I think in any case we are sufficiently well known to each other

BACON Why, of a surety it is my Lord Southampton!

SOUTHAMPTON Of a surety, it is

BACON And what does your lordship in these parts?

[Stands by the table R.C.]

SOUTHAMPTON [standing with back to fireplace] Odd's life, sir, I think I might well ask the same of you

BACON I will confess, my lord, the merest curiosity. Finding myself but a short space distant at Charlecote, I had desire to see what were the circumstances of one who made some small stir in his way. *Nil alienum*, you know

SOUTHAMPTON Charlecote! You did not speak of your errand there, I'll warrant. The name of Shakespeare smells none too sweet with that family. Is that why you cover your features on so warm a day?

BACON A natural caution, my lord, and no more. My business is my own business. My poor person is not unknown [removing his hat and scarf], and I would not have any doltish yokel spying upon my movements.

SOUTHAMPTON Unknown! Odd's life! You are like to be less unknown still, if report speaks true. My Lord Ellesmere is failing fast, they say. Solomon will not have to look far for a new Lord Chancellor.

BACON That is as His Majesty wills

SOUTHAMPTON He will be a fortunate man

BACON Your lordship is too kind [They bow]

SOUTHAMPTON Though you must not expect him to take your advice

BACON We shall see But your lordship has not told me what brought you here [Sits L. of the table]

SOUTHAMPTON [standing at fireplace] I knew Shakespeare well, as you are aware. In his last illness he wrote to me to beg I would at times see how his family are doing. 'Tis pure benevolence, in fact, though I almost blush to give it that name

BACON It does your lordship credit. That word of yours—benevolence—reminds me I had heard the will was of a strange character, and, thinking perchance the widow might be left in poor circumstances You take my meaning?

SOUTHAMPTON You mean a gift? [Comes to L.C.]

BACON No, not a gift Your lordship may not know it, but these yeomen are of stubborn stuff, and have an almighty conceit of themselves. Their pride, if you'll pardon me, is as great as your lordship's own [They both bow] No, I had thought to conceal my intentions under the guise of offering to purchase some paltry thing. Some article of use, some small piece of furniture, perchance

SOUTHAMPTON I knew it. I guessed it the moment you appeared [Crosses to R. of table]

BACON Knew what? You are strangely moved, my lord.

SOUTHAMPTON Is there anything you lawyers do not smell out?

BACON You talk in conundrums

SOUTHAMPTON But—you were not in New Place that month before he died—there was some carousing—

BACON I have never in my life been to New Place, nor is carousing one of my habits.

SOUTHAMPTON Yet some one may have told you I wonder if there was aught in what the mad fellow said, or perchance he was but merry Forgive me, sir, it was nothing [Sitting R of table] I was thinking of the will

BACON Hm! A strange business, truly And has it not struck you as equally strange that his collected writings, his plays, should not have been found? Was he not revising them before his death?

SOUTHAMPTON I have heard something of it

BACON [crossing L and standing near fireplace] I must tell you, my lord, that, touching this matter, there has been a report put of late about the town that irks me somewhat. Briefly, it is this of late many of my friends have supposed—indeed, have taxed me with being the author of this same Shakespeare's plays

SOUTHAMPTON You! You the writer of Will's plays! This is a jest indeed [Laughs]

BACON It is as I have said

SOUTHAMPTON [rising] A royal jest! And it irks my Lord Keeper that he is reputed the greatest playwright of the age

BACON I confess that to me it sorts but ill with my dignity, though he had parts, if little education

SOUTHAMPTON Why, man, in comparison with him—and I do full honour to your learning [bowing low]—you and I are but very small beer [Sits on L end of table]

BACON I do not deny his abilities Still, any writings of mine that may have some poor merit are known to deal with matters of grave import I meddle not with pageants, plays, and such toys Moreover, these same plays contain much matter of ribaldry, not to say bawdy stuff

SOUTHAMPTON And so my Lord Keeper would fain lay his hands on Mr Shakespeare's manuscripts And what would my Lord Keeper do with them when found?

134 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

[A shrug from BACON] They are worth money, Sir Francis.

BACON You—think so?

SOUTHAMPTON Assuredly. There is a mine of wealth to be made in the theatre if these meddling Puritans are kept in their place.

BACON Pah! The pence and ha'pence of sweaty mechanics!

SOUTHAMPTON What matter, if there be enough of them? And let me tell you, sir, if the mob stinks its money does not, as was remarked by the Emperor Vespasian to his son Titus on a somewhat different subject. [They laugh] Yes, it would be a notable discovery, for what is already published will doubtless soon be lost or botched beyond recognition. But let a tall of it no longer. Be sure the manuscripts were destroyed before his death, dying men oft have strange fancies. Yet, sir, you must be comforted. You are not the only man who has had greatness thrust upon him. There is another whose friends are determined poor Will Shakespeare's works were done by him. Can you not guess?

BACON Not—

SOUTHAMPTON [indicating himself] Yes.

BACON I'll! My lord Southampton, we know, is a magnificent patron of the arts. He can turn a pretty phrase and string some pretty verses together—but—no—

SOUTHAMPTON Not so fast, sir, there is something in it. Shakespeare owed more to me than the thousand pounds I bestowed on him.

BACON Perchance it was to you he owed the notion that Bohemia had a sea coast, my lord?

SOUTHAMPTON [smiling] I will not say, "This line I wrote, or this scene I devised, 'yet in a general manner I have no doubt the discerning will detect in the play

the assistance which a man of the world and of affairs may give to natural untaught genius [Going up to the door L.C.] Where can this cursed fellow be? I sent him an age since to find Mistress Shakespeare I must be on my way to London long before nightfall

BACON If you are in haste, my lord, why not entrust your errand to me?

SOUTHAMPTON [coming down again to c] By no means though I thank you heartily for the offer I can spare an hour or so Indeed, I was about to suggest that I might perform some office of the sort for you No doubt they sup early at Charlecote Country manners, you know I could make your little purchase for you, and you could repay me at your leisure

BACON You are most obliging, my lord, but I have a fancy for performing that office myself

SOUTHAMPTON As you wish You will have no objection, I trust, if I associate myself with your purpose? A shrewd and kindly contrivance, if I may say so

BACON Assuredly, my lord, so we pick not the same piece of furniture

SOUTHAMPTON In that case shall we be friendly rivals in bidding, eh? and so much the better for the widow It were best, perhaps, to adopt some names other than our own

BACON Well resolved! What say you to Mr Smith and Mr Jones?

SOUTHAMPTON Excellent! Mr Smith

[Indicating BACON, who bows

BACON Mr Jones? [SOUTHAMPTON bows] Perhaps if you call some one might come

SOUTHAMPTON I will [He goes outside door and calls] What! Fellow! Fellow! Whatever your cursed name may be [JUDITH enters from R.]

JUDITH What is the matter? Why——

[*I shrug from bacon*] They are worth money, Sir Francis

BACON You—think so?

SOUTHAMPTON Assuredly. There is a mine of wealth to be made in the theatre if these meddling Puritans are kept in their place.

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SOUTHAMPTON Excellent! Mr Smith

[Indicating BACON, who bows]

BACON Mr Jones? [SOUTHAMPTON bows] Perhaps if you call some one might come

SOUTHAMPTON I will [He goes outside door and calls] What! Fellow! Fellow! Whatever your cursed name may be [JUDITH enters from R.]

JUDITH What is the matter? Why-----

SOUTHAMPTON [returning] A thousand pardons, madam. It must seem to you that we have entered unannounced, but such is not the case, for I ventured to send your serving-man for Mistress Shakespeare. And you—you must be Susannah—or is it Judith? Nay, I think it must be Judith—Judith Shakespeare.

JUDITH [crying] Judith Quiney, sir. I have been married these four months.

SOUTHAMPTON I faith, a married woman of some standing—I crave your pardon [Bringing her to c.] But let me present to you Mr Smith, a gentleman learned in the law who is come on the same errand as myself. See, friend [to BACON], here we see our Miranda, our Perdita, for from her no doubt Will drew those characters.

JUDITH You knew my father, I see, sir.

SOUTHAMPTON None better, child. You loved him well?

JUDITH Aye, sir, I loved him dearly. [Turns away to R.]

SOUTHAMPTON Nay, we came not to awaken your grief anew, but to see in what manner we might serve your mother [ANNE appears at the door, up R., with a tray, on which are earthenware pots for jam making]. And here, if I mistake not, is Mistress Shakespeare [Moving up] Allow me, madam.

[Takes the tray and sets it down on table]

ANNE [L.C.] I thank you, sir. You are welcome, but you are strangers, I think?

[SOUTHAMPTON places chair L. of the table for ANNE.]

SOUTHAMPTON We both knew your late husband well, madam.

ANNE Not actors?

BACON [L.] God forbid, madam. We are gentlemen.

[Boys]

SOUTHAMPTON [L.C.] Permit me. I am William Jones, a poor gentleman, and this, my friend, Mr Smith, is a lawyer and an honest man—as lawyers go.

BACON Your servant, madam My friend, in the midst of his pleasantries, forgot to observe that our object in coming here was to be of service to our late friend's widow, if that were possible

ANNE And how can you serve me sir?

BACON Well, 'tis a delicate matter, but—I understand, madam, you were left but ill provided for by your husband's will

ANNE [bridling] I thank you, sir, I am comfortable enough

BACON Nay, but if it could be shown—shall we say? —that he was of unsound mind at the time I have some skill in the law—

ANNE Oh he was of sound enough mind, poor fellow

BACON Nevertheless the law is powerful

ANNE [rising] So you would have me question the will at the expense of my daughters? If that is the way you would serve me I will wish you a very good day

BACON I feared I should fail There remains one other matter For your husband I had both admiration and liking I would fain, with your permission purchase some small thing he once possessed for memory's sake

ANNE Nay, sir, if that is your wish you must seek out my daughter Susannah, at New Place, or Judith, here They have everything

BACON Except, I think—

ANNE Well, sir?

BACON One thing the second best—

ANNE God have mercy! [Turning away to JUDITH below table] This is too much! What did I tell you Judith? Even these strangers from London have heard of my humiliation [BACON moves up above table]

SOUTHAMPTON Nay, madam No doubt it was specially dear to your husband Hence he left it you

ANNE [angrily] God knows he lay on it seldom enough

138 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

in those years he was roaming in London with players  
and such low wasters

[JUDITH moves away to window R.C.

SOUTHAMPTON Fine madam! His plays made him the  
friend of princes and nobles

ANNE He did well enough, yet I would sooner he  
had stayed here. He might have done as well had he  
stuck to his father's business

SOUTHAMPTON To leave you madam, shows clear mad-  
ness, without a doubt

BACON [crossing to R. of table] But touching this bed  
madam I have need of some such gear myself, and would  
soon possess it. I will offer you ten crowns if you will sell

SOUTHAMPTON [L. of table, ANNE between them] I'll  
give you twenty

BACON Twenty five

SOUTHAMPTON Thirty

ANNE Gentlemen, gentlemen the bed is not worth  
near so much! The mattress is poor flock and hard at  
that, as I can witness. Now, if it were the best bed which  
my daughter Susannah—

BACON Fifty crowns, madam—fifty

SOUTHAMPTON A hundred!

JUDITH [coming down R.] Mother, a hundred crowns!

BACON A hundred and fifty

SOUTHAMPTON I'll double it three hundred crowns

BACON Nay, Mr Jones you are too much for me  
The bed, no doubt, is yours, and much good may it do  
you! [Moves up above table]

SOUTHAMPTON Then the bed is mine. Are you will-  
ing, mistress? Three hundred crowns

ANNE No, sir

SOUTHAMPTON You want more?

ANNE I want none of your money, sir

JUDITH [R. of ANNE] Mother!

SOUTHAMPTON You will not sell?

ANNE I will not

SOUTHAMPTON But why—why?

ANNE That is my business, sir May I not do as I wish with my own? Why you desire my bed God knows, I only know you shall not have it

BACON [crossing L. towards door] A round answer, Mr Jones You have my sympathy

SOUTHAMPTON Madam, consider

ANNE I have considered, sir I refuse your offer, and if you have no more business with me I shall be obliged if you will go on your ways, for I have much to do

BACON That is the signal for our departure, sir Will you accompany me?

SOUTHAMPTON Madam, I beg you— No? Well, well, I see there is no help for it [Moving up L.C.] I give you good-day Long may you be spared to lie on your bed [Turning at door] If you should relent— No? I'll begone, then Now, Mr Smith

BACON Madam, your servant After you, Mr Jones

SOUTHAMPTON No, no, you first

*[They eventually attempt to go out at the same time  
At last with many bows and courtesies to one  
another they take themselves off]*

ANNE [moving up to the doorway and calling] Jeremy, Jeremy!

JUDITH I am glad after all you did not let them have the bed, but they were pleasant spoken gentlemen How could you use them so discourteously, Mother?

ANNE That was no needy gentleman, nor was the other a lawyer neither, though who or what they were I cannot say Jeremy! We'll have that mattress in here 'Tis dark as Egypt in the bedroom Jeremy!

JEREMY [off L.] Here, mistress, here!

[Enter JEREMY from garden

ANNE Help Mistress Judith bring in the mattress from my bed.

JUDITH Are you mad, Mother?

JEREMY The mattress, mistress?

ANNE Yes, of course.

JEREMY But why?

ANNE Do as I bid you, and quickly, too.

JEREMY Yes, mistress.

(*Exeunt JEREMY and JUDITH up R. They reappear after a moment, dragging a huge mattress between them. Meanwhile ANNE clears a space, then goes to help them.*)

JEREMY [C.] Am I to carry this to Mistress Sue's also? I shall need a wagon at least.

ANNE [L. of mattress] You are to do nothing but go.

JEREMY Nothing, mistress?

ANNE Go, go, go, I say! [Drives him out up L.C.] Now, Judith, your scissors, haste!

JUDITH [R.C., *giving scissors from belt at her waist*] What are you about, Mother?

ANNE [L.C.] The thought came to me in a moment. As they were talking of the bed I remembered more than one plaguey hard spot I had felt many a night of late. 'Twas the mattress they were after. Three hundred crowns! 'Tis a pot of gold at least.

[*Begins to rip up the mattress.*

JUDITH Why, Mother, this is the maddest—

ANNE Be quiet, child, and search—search

[*They feel about the mattress. Suddenly JUDITH gives a cry.*

JUDITH There is something here!

ANNE Where, where?

JUDITH Let me do it. I have—I have it! [Pulling out several bulky parchment manuscripts] Why, what is this? [Reading the titles] *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.*

*The Life and Death of King Richard II* . Why,  
Mother, it is his writings—the lost plays!

ANNE What?

JUDITH Father's plays See, here they all are!

ANNE [collapsing in the armchair] The plays! God  
have mercy, and I thought it was something of worth!

JUDITH Dear Father, he thought the world of his  
writings This is his way of ensuring you should have  
them

ANNE He could have spared me some uneasy nights  
had he thought of some other means Eh, dear, dear,  
dear! What a disappointment! 'Twas just like him.  
Poor dear Will! He meant very well

SLOW CURTAIN

• THE STRANGER  
*By L. DU GARDE FRENCH*

CHARACTERS

HARRY  
DELIA, *his wife*  
THE STRANGER  
AN ANNOUNCER

## THE STRANGER<sup>1</sup>

SCENE: *The interior of a week end country cottage. It is Christmas Eve. The cottage is very warm and cosy inside. Outside it is a wild night, snowing hard. (The howling of the wind and the occasional rattle of hail on the window-panes should be heard throughout the play.)*

DELIA Have you locked the front door and put the mat against it, dear?

HARRY Yes Two mats Enough to keep the whole of the North Pole out

DELIA That's right Then pull that curtain closer and let's be cosy

HARRY That do?

DELIA That's better What an awful night!

HARRY Pretty bad Real Christmas Eve weather, what? I'm glad we're not walking up from the station

DELIA Errrr! Yes It would be a pretty long five miles to-night How deep was the snow when you looked out?

HARRY About a foot But it must be a lot deeper over the top of the hill It drifts like anything—especially in this wind [The wind howls] Listen to it!

DELIA Don't want to I can hear it quite plainly enough without listening to it It sounds like a million ghosts all howling round the chimneys

HARRY Let 'em howl—as long as they don't get in here. I say, I hope it won't bring down the aerial

<sup>1</sup> Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

DELIA. It probably will. I've never known it blow like this before.

HARRY. I hope not. I don't want to miss the concert to-night. They're doing real Christmas stuff—carols and all that, you know.

DELIA. How jolly! But it isn't really so romantic as having the people outside in the snow with lanterns, is it?

HARRY. It may not be so romantic, but it's a jolly sight more comfortable for the carolers, and I don't suppose they mind swapping romance for comfort. They'll be all nice and snug in the studio in London, caroling away into the microphone.

DELIA. I suppose it's very wonderful, but it isn't so Christmassy, somehow. They ought to be all muffled up and blowing on their fingers—oh, and jolly splashes of light on the snow from the lanterns, and all that sort of thing.

HARRY. That's just like a woman. Always ready to sacrifice other people's comfort to your idea of romance [The wind howls again.] By Jove, it is blowing. Is that haul on the window?

DELIA. Sounds like it. What are you doing with those curtains?

HARRY. Only just wanted to have a look out. It makes it seem so snug in here by contrast. The air is thick with it, and the whole place is simply blotted out with the snow. I can't see the path at all.

DELIA. Do you want to?

HARRY. Not particularly. Purely scientific curiosity. I say, it's very jolly having this cottage for the summer and all that, but most people would say we were stark, staring mad to come out here for Christmas.

DELIA. If you keep those curtains open much longer I shall begin to believe that they would be right. There's a most fearful draught. [The wind howls loudly.] Oh,

Harry, do pull them close, there's a dear I shall be blown right out of my chair

HARRY Right-o ! Do you realize that we shall be snowed up by morning ?

DELIA Oh jolly !

HARRY I dare say You won't have to dig us out

DELIA Oh, Harry, how lovely ! That really *does* sound Christmassy and old English ! Shall we truly have to be dug out ?

HARRY You will I shall be doing the digging

*[The wind howls and hail rattles on the window.]*

DELIA Harry, isn't it wonderful to be all cut off from the world like this—just our two selves ?

HARRY Oh, top-hole !

DELIA You might sound a little more enthusiastic about it

HARRY Sorry, darling I was still rather thinking of the job of digging us out in the morning

DELIA But it *is* wonderful, isn't it ?

HARRY Of course it is, sweetheart

DELIA Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely cut off

HARRY Oh, absolutely !

DELIA No relations, no callers——

HARRY No hawkers, no circulars !

DELIA Oh, Harry, I just love it !

*[The wind shrieks and howls.]*

HARRY It is a bit eerie, too, isn't it ?

DELIA Yes, it is a bit I should be terrified if I were by myself—imagining all sorts of things !

HARRY I know Ghosts ! *[The wind wails.]* Like that. Did you hear it ?

DELIA Oh, horrible !

HARRY And horrid, creepy, groaning witches and things ! *[The wind moans.]* Like that I'm sure that was a witch outside the window

## 148 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

DELIA Don't Harry! You're trying to frighten me

HARRY And then, you know, when the wind was howling its worst there would come a sudden mysterious knocking at the door. Like— [There is a sudden treble knock at the door. DELIA gives a little scream.] Good Lord! What's that? [Pause. The knocking is repeated.] It's some one at the door

DELIA [in a sharp, high voice] Don't go!

HARRY Good heavens, why not?

DELIA Sorry, Harry. Of course you must go. Only, coming suddenly like that

HARRY Yes. It was rum. Gave me quite a turn. Can't leave anyone on the doorstep on a night like this, though. [The wind shrieks more loudly as he opens the door.] Who's there?

STRANGER 'Veree sorry to disturb you, m'sieu', but when I see a light I say to myself—

HARRY That's all right. What can I do for you?

STRANGER I fear I've lose my way a little.

HARRY Where are you making for?

STRANGER Dover.

HARRY Good heavens! Why, it's miles! On a night like this, too!

STRANGER Is it then so veree far yet?

HARRY Twenty miles at least. Come in for a minute, this wind's awful.

STRANGER If you will be so veree kind to show me the way, m'sieu', I think I shall continue.

HARRY But you couldn't possibly go on in this weather.

STRANGER But yes, m'sieu', it is imperative. I've been out in worse.

HARRY Well, just come inside for a moment so that I can shut the door while I direct you. [The wind grows fainter as the door is shut.] That's better. This is my wife.

STRANGER. Good evening, madame. It is veree good—

DELIA. Oh, no. It's Christmas Eve, you know. And you must be awfully wet and cold. Do come by the fire.

STRANGER But—

HARRY. Yes, of course you must. And have some hot whisky-and-water.

STRANGER I 'ave a car, *m'sieu'*. I leave it up the road.

HARRY. There's *not* likely to be much traffic to-night. It'll be all right if it doesn't get snowed up. Come across to the fire, and I'll get you that drink. I say, you're limping. Had a fall or something?

STRANGER I am always lame since I am born.

HARRY. Oh—sorry! Sit down, won't you?

DELIA. Yes, do.

STRANGER. Thank you, madame. I am *en route* to go back to France, you know, to sunshine.

DELIA. How you must hate this weather!

STRANGER It is veree English.

HARRY. There you are. That'll warm you up.

STRANGER I thank you, *m'sieu'*. *À votre santé*, madame.

DELIA. That's good health, isn't it? Thank you.

STRANGER. Ah! That is bettaire! *M'sieu'*, you 'ave save my life.

HARRY. Very glad to be of help. Must you really get on to Dover to-night?

STRANGER. I am afraid yes.

HARRY. You'll find the roads pretty bad. I know what they're like round here at the best of times. Have you come far?

STRANGER. From London, but it is veree slow.

HARRY. Yes, I suppose so. Have another drink?

STRANGER. *M'sieu'*, you are veree kind to a strangaire.

HARRY. Oh, no. Christmas Eve, you know.

DELIA. Yes. It's awful hard lines on you to have to travel

150 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

on Christmas Eve, and on a night like this, too. Every body ought to be at home and happy on Christmas Eve.

STRANGER That too, madame, is veree English. But it is veree nice. Ah—Christmas Eve! The old English Christmas spirit, eh? And the old English—how do you call them?—carols, yes?

DELIA Oh, yes—the carols. We were just waiting to pick them up on the wireless when you came.

HARRY By Jove, yes. They'll have started. You must hear a Christmas carol before you go.

STRANGER But, m'veu, it is that I intrude—

DELIA Oh, no, just one.

STRANGER Madame, I am charmed.

HARRY Half a minute while I switch on the loud speaker.

STRANGER It is a veree wonderful thing, this wireless. It makes me frightened of it.

DELIA Frightened! Why?

STRANGER I do not know, madame. Just the fear of the unknown, perhaps.

HARRY Here we are [The carol of "Good King Wenceslas" is faintly heard. It swells louder, and is sung through to the end]. That was pretty clear, wasn't it?

STRANGER Veree charming—vere English!

ANNOUNCER This is the National programme.

HARRY That's Dodgson speaking. I know him.

ANNOUNCER We have been asked by the Commissioner of Police to broadcast the following: A daring burglary was committed in London this afternoon, and the authorities at Scotland Yard are anxious to trace the whereabouts of a foreigner of medium height who speaks English with a French accent. He is lame in one foot, and is believed to be motoring towards Dover . . .

HARRY Hallo! What's this? Why— [Then, in a sudden, sharp voice] Mind that lamp!

[*There is a crash of glass as the lamp is smashed*  
DELIA screams.

DELIA. Harry! Be careful. . . I Don't do anything. . . !

[*The wind suddenly howls as the door is opened.*

STRANGER [*shouting above the sound of the storm*]. Bon  
soir, m'sieu' et madame. It is veree imperative that I go.  
I thank you for your *hospitalité* Veree charming—vereel  
English! Bon soir.

[*The door slams, and the sound of the wind decreases.*

DELIA. Strike a light, Harry—quickly . . . !

[*Sound of a match being struck.*

HARRY. Gone! Well, I'm blowed!

[*The carol "The First Noel" begins, swells up, and*  
*fades away.*

150 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

on Christmas Eve, and on a night like this, too. Every body ought to be at home and happy on Christmas Eve

STRANGER That too, madame, is veree English. But it is veree nice. Ah—Christmas Eve! The old English Christmas spirit, eh? And the old English—how do you call them?—carols, yes?

DELIA Oh, yes—the carols. We were just waiting to pick them up on the wireless when you came.

HARRY By Jove, yes. They'll have started. You must hear a Christmas carol before you go.

STRANGER But, m'sieu', it is that I intrude—

DELIA Oh, no, just one.

STRANGER Madame, I am charmed.

HARRY Half a minute while I switch on the loud speaker.

STRANGER It is a veree wonderful thing, this wireless. It makes me frightened of it.

DELIA Frightened! Why?

STRANGER I do not know, madame. Just the fear of the unknown, perhaps.

HARRY Here we are. [The carol of "Good King Wenceslas" is faintly heard. It swells louder, and is sung through to the end.] That was pretty clear, wasn't it?

STRANGER Veree charming—vere English!

ANNOUNCER This is the National programme.

HARRY That's Dodgson speaking. I know him.

ANNOUNCER We have been asked by the Commissioner of Police to broadcast the following. A daring burglary was committed in London this afternoon, and the authorities at Scotland Yard are anxious to trace the whereabouts of a foreigner of medium height who speaks English with a French accent. He is lame in one foot, and is believed to be motoring towards Dover.

HARRY Hallo! What's this? Why— [Then, in a sudden, sharp voice] Mind that lamp!

[There is a crash of glass as the lamp is smashed  
DELIA screams]

DELIA. Harry! Be careful . . . I Don't do anything. . . !

[The wind suddenly howls as the door is opened

STRANGER [shouting above the sound of the storm] Bon  
soir, m'sieu' et madame. It is veree imperative that I go.  
I thank you for your hospitalité Veree charming—vereel  
English! Bon soir.

[The door slams, and the sound of the wind decreases.

DELIA. Strike a light, Harry—quickly. . . !

[Sound of a match being struck.

HARRY. Gone! Well, I'm blowed!

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fades away.

THE APPLE-TREE  
OR, WHY MISERY NEVER DIES  
*By HAROLD BRIGHOUSE*

CHARACTERS

MISERY  
SCOLD  
RICHES  
AN ANGEL  
DEATH  
A BOY

## THE APPLE-TREE<sup>1</sup>

*In the centre of the stage stands an apple tree, full of fruit  
Behind is a small mud cottage or hut, with thatched  
roof Door to hut From hut hedges R and L An  
entrance through one hedge Sky cloth behind The  
set can be either realistic or conventional, but the tree  
must be practicable*

*The costumes are medieval, and since this is a Breton legend  
they might preferably be Breton, but nothing alarming  
is required unless it be the ANGEL And if we are to  
have an angel let us be thorough, let us have no com-  
promise about our ANGEL, who is bare footed, white  
robed, and winged DEATH is in black and wears a  
hood, MISERY and SCOLD are in rags RICHES in scarlet  
and the BOY of any class you please, because boys of all  
classes steal apples*

*The BOY enters by the hedge gap, scouts round notes the  
closed door of the hut, looks up at the tree, then climbs  
and is concealed in it MISERY, a gnarled old man,  
enters by hedge gap with a vessel of water He shows  
admiration of the tree, and proceeds to water it SCOLD,  
his wife enters from hut looking for MISERY*

SCOLD I turn my back and you are here again Into  
the house with you you taper of a man!

MISERY Give me time to water my tree My tree is  
thirsty, Scold

<sup>1</sup> Separate copies of this play may be obtained from Messrs Gowans and Gray Ltd., 58 Cadogan Street Glasgow Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd 26 Southampton Street Strand London W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street New York

SCOLD Thirsty? It's a toper, and as useless as a toper. If we had the eating of but one ripe apple in the year I would not say your care was wasted. But every year it is the same.

MISERY [stroking the tree] Always the same. A wonderful tree. Other trees have seasons when they fail to bear, but my tree has a load of fruit each year without a miss.

SCOLD Yes, and for whom? For you? For me? No! Watch and guard it as you do, the apples never come to us. I like an apple well, but do I ever get one?

MISERY But this year—

SCOLD So you have said, and yet the apples went. And so it will be again, this year like every other year. At the first glowing of the sun in your apples' cheeks they'll go.

MISERY I say this year is different. Look! Use your eyes! [Pointing] Those apples ripen. They are on the edge of ripeness now. One more day of sunshine, with the water I pour at the roots, and rich, juicy fruit will—

SCOLD Will take wings and fly from us.

MISERY [shaking fist towards hedge entrance] A generation of thieves! But not this time, you robbers of the poor, you filchers of an old man's only joy! I shall not sleep this night. I shall sit up with my tree. I will nurse my darlings, and to-morrow—

SCOLD To-morrow they will be gone.

MISERY No. Not this time. Not if you will let me watch.

SCOLD Watch when there is work to do in there? Watch with Michaelmas at hand and Master Riche's crying for his rent? Into the house, you idle knave!

[Takes him by the ear]

MISERY But the apples !

SCOLD But the shilling for the rent !

*[Two apples drop. They look up. The boy slides down with bulging pockets.]*

MISERY Oh, the rogue ! Thieves ! Thieves !

*[The boy dodges him round tree, upsets SCOLD, leads MISERY into corner and escapes past him across stage and runs off]*

MISERY. The two-legged fox ! The crafty cullion ! Oh, the filching devil !

SCOLD *[still sitting where she fell]* A fine watcher you are ! And you would watch by night when this is how you watch by day !

MISERY. My apples ! My apples !

*[Goes to pick up those which fell]*

SCOLD Leave them.

MISERY. Leave them ? Leave my apples ? God 'a' mercy, they will roast.

SCOLD. I'll roast you first Going to pick them up before you help me to my feet !

MISERY *[going to her]* Well . . . there ! There ! *[Helps her up]* But to let good apples be ! The sin of it ! The sin of waste !

SCOLD. Let them be and rot. I'll punish you with the sight of them

MISERY *[shaking his head]*. This is a woman's prank. It's against reason. A foul piece of work to leave good apples rotting. I cannot abide it. I—

*[Makes for the apples]*

SCOLD *[picking up stick and beating him from apples towards door]* And I cannot abide you, you idle apple-gaper ! To work, you lazy-guts, you lath of sloth, you—

*[He gives way towards door, eyeing the apples. The ANGEL appears at the hedge-gap]*

ANGEL Peace be with you !

158 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

SCOLD [taking the ANGEL entirely as a matter of course]  
Look you, Misery, even the angels must come to gaze on  
such a piece of idleness as you

MISERY Nay, Master Angel, I was but tending my  
apple tree, and she—

SCOLD He thinks of nothing but his beastly tree  
[Raising stick] I'll teach him to—

ANGEL [coming between them] Master Misery and  
Gossip Scold I pray you listen. This wrangling is un-  
seemly, and I am come in good time to end your strife  
with the gift I bring. I am a travelling angel, journeying  
in all the ways of the world to give each person one  
desire

SCOLD Only one?

ANGEL One

MISERY [eagerly] Then give me mine Master Angel!  
Give me mine!

ANGEL Surely I give to all

MISERY Grant that if any climb that tree to steal apples  
he shall stick there until I give him leave to come down

ANGEL But—

MISERY Have I asked too much?

ANGEL Sadly too little. Of all the splendid wishes that  
you might have asked, to ask that a man shall stick in an  
apple tree! Could you not ask wisdom, virtue, courage,  
charity—

MISERY Chancy!

ANGEL Health, modesty, love, humility, amiability,  
or—

MISERY [impatiently] Is the wish you offer me to be my  
wish or yours?

ANGEL Yours; but won't you listen to—

MISERY I have listened. Look you, Master Angel, you  
speak of modesty, humility. And do I ask for gold? Am  
I covetous? Do I desire authority, empire, pleasure, riot,

lust? Then grant me my modest, humble wish. Grant me the punishing of evildoers. Grant that a thief shall stick in my tree till I release him.

ANGEL. You have no better wish than that? No wish of kindness towards your wife?

MISERY. Wife? Vixen! Witch! Beldame!

ANGEL. Misery, Misery, so much depends upon this wish of yours.

MISERY. Yes. My apples.

ANGEL. You will not change it?

MISERY. No.

ANGEL. Then it is granted

[MISERY rubs his hands together in joy.]

SCOLD. Have I a wish?

ANGEL. A charitable wish, I hope. A wish, fair lady, in keeping with your comely face.

MISERY. Ha, a cozening angel! Her comely face—the sour-visaged hag!

ANGEL. A sweet wish, for the love of Mary.

SCOLD. I wish Death may come to Misery

[ANGEL backs in sorrow.]

MISERY. But how shall I enjoy my apples, then? [He is aghast, and argues so far, then turns on SCOLD.] You drab, you cat, you slut! [To ANGEL] I have a new wish, Master Angel. I take back my wish, and—

ANGEL. Too late, Master Misery. I gave you warning.

MISERY. Too late! [Snatching stick] I'll trounce you for this, old withered witch!

SCOLD. Master Angel, do I get my wish?

ANGEL [sadly]. I have no choice but to grant it.

MISERY [going for her with stick]. And dearly shall it cost you. Take that, and that, and—

[SCOLD runs off into hut, pursued by MISERY.]

[The ANGEL makes gesture of resignation, and goes out by hedge. A pause. Enter RICHES, who

160 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

*is middle-aged but not old, and goes importantly towards door, looks in then sees apples on ground, stops, looks round, picks them up, admires them, looks at tree, tiptoes to door, looks round door post, then goes to tree, pockets apples, looks round and climbs tree. A branch breaks noisily. MISERY runs out of hut*

MISERY Thieves! Thieves! This time I have you! Stay up that tree until I give you leave to come down!

RICHES Oh I freeze! I cannot stir!

MISERY [chuckling] Now do you feel the power of Misery, you grabbling, filching boy? [Looks up hard] Gog's sides it is not a boy! Fie Master Riches is it you? [Calls] Scold! Scold! [Enter SCOLD. Going to her] Truly you told me Master Riches would be coming for his rent. Oh but a word in your ear, Gossip, a word to you who mocked my apple-tree. See you how Master Riches pays himself his rent? Not in money, not by knocking at the door for the silver shilling we had ready for him. No, but by apples, by the good apples he values more than coin. [Snarling up at RICHES] Stay there, then, greedy-guts! Eat apples till your belly bursts!

RICHES Let me down!

MISERY But Master Riches is where he has climbed

RICHES This is witchcraft. Have a heed, Master Misery. Men have been burned at the stake as sorcerers for less than this.

MISERY Ha! The pretty mistletoe in my apple-tree! The talking mistletoe! Scold, run to our neighbours quickly and tell them what a rare show is here. A treat to see the monster hanging on my apple-tree. A treat to see strange fruit, fat fruit, talking fruit.

RICHES Call neighbours to see me in this plight!

SCOLD You will be hanged for this, Misery.

MISERY He hangs best who hangs last, and Master

Riches hangs now. Oh, a gay gallows-tree, I warrant you ! A pretty gibbet for pretty Master Riches. Go, I tell you ! Go call, that all may pay their groat to see !

RICHES. Do not go, Scold. Good Gossip Scold, don't go, and I will give you——

SCOLD. What will you give ?

RICHES. My thanks. My grateful thanks.

MISERY. A murrain on the thanks of Riches ! [Cunningly] Not that I would be hard with Master Riches. Not that I wish the village to see him trussed like a fowl on the spit. Not that I would not drive a bargain with kind Master Riches if good Master Riches had a mind to offer ransom for release.

RICHES. Release me, or——

MISERY. Or what, good Master Riches ?

RICHES. Oh, that I were free ! I cannot move. I stick fast.

MISERY. You adhere. You grow there, Master Riches, in your high place in the world [Sits under tree]. A leafy shade to keep the sun from Master Riches. Indeed, my lord, it will be pleasant in the summer, but chilly of a winter's night, when the branches whip you in the gale like scorpions.

RICHES. I'll have you flayed for this ! My father is sick of the dropsy, and like to die without me there to inherit.

SCOLD. You chose to leave him and to come looking for your rent.

RICHES. I have many duties in the world. Oh, will you free me, you pestilence ? Free me, or——

MISERY. Or ? Methought I heard Master Riches making me a bid for his release. 'Twas but the rustling of the leaves. Go, bring the neighbours, Scold.

RICHES. I do make a bid. I bid sixpence.

MISERY. The wind stirs the leaves, Scold.

RICHES. A whole shilling.

MISERY A whisper of the wind Too low for me to hear

RICHES A crown I offer a crown

MISERY This freedom that men talk about! And Master Ruches values it at a crown!

RICHES Oh name your price!

MISERY [getting up] First Master Ruches shall lay no information

RICHES I am not likely to tell of this

MISERY No Master Ruches has his pride He will not tell how he grew in an apple tree No information and no rent Misery shall live rent free for ever

RICHES Rent free! It's subversive of the laws of property

MISERY [mocking] Alack the sinner that I am! God be merciful to me a sinner! Master Ruches am I to go on asking God to be merciful to me, a rent free sinner, or do you stay where you are?

RICHES [with a struggle] It is agreed Now release me

MISERY But swear it, Master Ruches I give you leave to raise your arm that you may swear [RICHES gesticulates mildly with right arm] Ah only your arm is free The rest of you awaits my word which you shall have when you have sworn

RICHES [raising arm] I swear that Misery shall live rent free

MISERY And that you lay no information

RICHES And that I lay no information

MISERY You may come down [RICHES descends snarling] You say my lord?

RICHES I could say many things but I must hurry to the bedside of my dying father

MISERY [on his knees] Oh, Mother Mary be compassionate to poor Master Ruches, who has so many hard duties in the world

RICHES Pah !

[He kicks MISERY, who rolls over  
[Exit RICHES by hedgeSCOLD [as MISERY rises, rubbing himself] There will be  
more reckoning to comeMISERY The devil give you sorrow ! Gog's sides, have  
I not conquered Riches ?

SCOLD A Bedlam conquest

MISERY Bedlam ? Has he not sworn me free of rent ?

SCOLD Rent free in your grave, you fool !

MISERY Grave ?

SCOLD You got your wish from Master Angel I shall  
have mine now, mine, that wished Death to come to  
MiseryMISERY. Plague on your scurvy wish ! Ha, but I will  
mar your mischief What, Misery that thwarted Riches  
be overthrown by Death ? No ! Come, Death ! Come,  
you dirty dastard, and go as empty as you came [To  
SCOLD] And you—into your spinning with you ! Make  
gear, work your fingers to the bone for your Master  
Misery that sits under his apple-tree like a spider with  
his web [Sits] Come, you flies, and let Misery make  
meals of you In, slut ! In, I say !SCOLD To my needle, then Ob, the good work, sew-  
ing a shroud for Misery !

MISERY [growling] What ?

SCOLD A toothsome drudgery A sweet and whole-  
some task Oh, the dainty shroud that I will make for  
Misery ![MISERY half rises SCOLD goes in He sits, looking  
up, admiring the tree The hooded figure of  
DEATH appears by hedge MISERY sees it, and  
rocks himself as if in agonyMISERY Oh, the bitterness ! To feel death coming to  
me when my apples want a day of being ripe ! [Looks at  
DEATH] Master, have pity on an old weak man !

DEATH I pity all

MISERY Then you will pity me. You will not let an old man die with the wish of his life ungranted

DEATH [shaking head] Misery, I am come for you now

MISERY And would I deny you Master Death? What more welcome caller can Misery have than Death? [Bowing] But a prayer in your ear, Master Death: a little boon I crave

DEATH I can hear no prayers now

MISERY One day. Only one day more. One day and my apples will be ripe. [DEATH looks up at tree] Master Death, every year I have loved to eat ripe apples off my tree, and every year they have been stolen before ripeness came. This year, see! The apples are on the tree, but not ripe, not quite ripe, not by one other day quite ripe. Grant me that I may eat one ripe apple from my tree before I die.

DEATH Time! Time, Master Misery! I cannot wait.

MISERY Is my wish so monstrous?

DEATH It is moderate. A wish that I would grant if I had no other calls to make. But [looks at tree] is it sure there are none ripe to day?

MISERY Oh, if there were!

DEATH I think there are

MISERY It may be, Master Death. My eyes are bleared. You tell me there are ripe apples now?

DEATH To all appearing

MISERY Oh, the happiness of dying with my greatest wish fulfilled! Master Death, if there is an apple ripe will you give me time to eat it? [He gets up slowly]

DEATH Master Misery, you are an example to the dying. If you knew what swollen wishes I am asked to grant! I will not deny so stout a wish as yours.

MISERY Most kindly Death! A minute, then! A minute while I bring a ladder! [Goes towards door]

DEATH. Stay ! You must not go out of my sight.

MISERY. But I am weak and old. The dying cannot climb a tree. Master Death, I pray you, do not give and in the same breath take away.

DEATH. You cannot climb, but I can [Climbing] This is more speedy than a ladder.

MISERY. Oh, kind Master Death ! Obliging Master Death ! Now I shall get my apple if there be an apple ripe

DEATH [up the tree] Many are nearly ripe, but

[He looks at apples, pulling down branches.]

MISERY. If there be one I die happy—one that is rich and brown and golden with the sun.

DEATH. They may be ripe without full colour

MISERY. I know Master Death will not deceive me.

DEATH. I will not deceive. [Feels apples on tree] These feel mellow.

MISERY. But are they golden ?

DEATH. They may be golden to the taste I will try.

[Plucks an apple and bites.]

MISERY [in triumph] Ha ! Now I have you ! Villain thief, that takes my apple without my leave ! Did I tell you to pick or taste ? Thief ! Stay in the tree till I give you word to come down ! Stay in the tree, you stealer of men's lives and of my apples ! [To door] Scold, Scold, come here and look at Death ! Ha, this is what many men desire—to look Death in the face and to be unafraid. Scold ! [SCOLD enters, sewing a shroud.]

SCOLD. Your shroud is nearly done.

MISERY. Shroud, vixen ? Shroud ? Shrouds are out of season from this great day to the end of time. Look where Master Death hangs helpless in my apple-tree !

[Snatches shroud]

DEATH. This is an ill return for kindness.

MISERY. Kindness, you creeping cannibal ! Who wants Death's kindness ? Not Misery, I warrant you.

SCOLD I wanted Death for Misery I'll not be tricked.

MISERY Bah, serpent, I have drawn your sting Misery, immortal Misery, has caught Death in his fly-trap

SCOLD Master Angel promised—

MISERY That Death would come He came and he stays

SCOLD Oh, you shake your rotten bones, you hoaxing, cheating knave ! Let Master Death go free, or I will be a torment to you You shall never rest, for I will prick you with my needle You shall never lie down to sleep, but my screaming in your ear will drive sleep from you You shall thirst and hunger and I'll not serve you You shall—

MISERY Drab be silent ! Do honour to Master Misery, who has conquered Death

SCOLD Honour ? You stain, you spot, you slut ! You—

MISERY [thrusting throud round her head] Silence, or I will choke life from you !

SCOLD [struggling] You cannot Death's in the tree

MISERY [straining to hold her] You cannot die ! I had not thought of that You can never die

DEATH No one can die except Death come to them

MISERY [desperately] Then all shall live, and great glory will come to me, that am Death's keeper.

SCOLD [pricking him with needle] That for your glory !

MISERY And that for you, curst witch ! [Buffets her] Oh, it were almost worth freeing Death that you might die ! [RICHTES appears by hedge.]

RICHES Master Misery ! Master Misery !

MISERY Now what a pest has Richtes to do with Misery ? [He turns from SCOLD]

RICHES Much I want to find Death, not for myself For my father Oh, if you but saw how the poor soul suffers to be stayed thus in his passing ! Death came to the door, then left and came this way

MISERY [pointing to DEATH] There is Master Death  
Does the situation of Master Death bring anything to the  
remembrance of Master Riches ?

RICHES Death, in your tree !

MISERY I caught a fly in my trap I caught Master  
Riches, and I had a meal off him But there's a fly too  
rare for eating Master Death stays where he is

RICHES But the world can't do without Death ! Why,  
my father will live for ever

MISERY And Master Riches will not inherit

[Chuckles]

DEATH Misery, I end the pain of man I am the  
beginning and the end, for without end there is no be  
gunning Death makes life possible Let me down that  
I may do my work

MISERY No, thief You'd do your foul work on me  
You would steal my life

SCOLD Offer him gold, Master Riches [In his ear]  
Much gold that you need never give [Indicates DEATH]

MISERY Fool, would gold tempt me when I should die  
before I have the joy of it ? Gold for you to inherit !

SCOLD [to RICHES] Wait, my lord I have another  
thought [Exit SCOLD to hut]

DEATH Misery, where all live on alike, where is the  
gain to you ?

MISERY Can Scold die ?

DEATH If Death walks the world Scold can die

MISERY Yes crafty one, and so could I

RICHES Master Death, compound with him I will die  
willingly—er—when my time comes But my father  
now, lying in pain, praying for sweet, easeful Master  
Death and—

DEATH Your father is but one [To MISERY] Frustrat-  
ing Death you frustrate Life You hold the unhorn  
back ; you—

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willingly—er—when my time comes But my father  
now, lying in pain, praying for sweet, easeful Master  
Death and—

DEATH Your father is but one [To MISERY] Frustrat  
ing Death you frustrate Life You hold the unborn  
back, you—

168 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MISERY [chuckling] He, he! I thwart creation Misery shall never die

DEATH That is the composition I offer you Let me discharge my general office in the world and you shall live for ever

MISERY And all shall know I live?

DEATH [sadly] All shall know

MISERY [exultantly] Living when all other men must die! Oh Master Death, this is a pithy bargain! Now will I take your gold, Master Riches

RICHES But—

MISERY I will not live alone I choose gold for one of my companions [Holding hand out] Gold! Give me of your gold

RICHES All my gold?

MISERY Not all I take with prudence that I may take often If you would have me release Master Death —gold! Think of your inheritance, and spare of your present gold in reverence to the masterdom of Misery

DEATH Give!

RICHES Easy for you to say "Give!" when it is mine

DEATH In the end, Master Riches, it is mine Give!

RICHES [giving purse to MISERY] Thus marks my pleasure in my father's death

MISERY [chinking purse, chuckling] First fruits of many jocund days for Master Misery It is a good bargain I have made with Death I give your worship leave to come down

DEATH [descending] I am overdue in many places

RICHES My father first, Master Death My suffer-

ing—

MISERY Suffering, wealthy father

[DEATH nods acquiescence to RICHES, and they turn to go RICHES eagerly leading SCOULD enters from hut with an axe

SCOLD Cut the tree down, and so—— [Sees DEATH]  
Oh !

MISERY Ha, vixen, would you cheat me thus ? Cut down my tree if you like Misery is lord of life Oh, the wondrous wine of knowing I alone in all the world shall live for ever !

DEATH [from hedge entrance] Not alone

MISERY [holding up purse] No Gold and I——

DEATH And Scold your wife Man and wife you shall live

MISERY My wife ! Scold !

DEATH I shall come neither for you nor her

MISERY Oh, diddling Death ! False, juggling cheater ! There is no justice in the world

DEATH But there is Death—for others

[Exeunt RICHES and DEATH

[MISERY sinks in utter dejection to the ground, dropping the purse SCOLD snatches the purse MISERY scrambles up, and they are struggling for the purse as the curtain falls.

168 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MISERY [chuckling]. He, he! I thwart creation. Misery shall never die.

DEATH! That is the composition I offer you. Let me discharge my general office in the world and you shall live for ever.

MISERY And all shall know I live?

DEATH! [sadly] All shall know.

MISERY [exultantly]. Living when all other men must die! Oh, Master Death, this is a pitiful bargain! Now will I take your gold, Master Riches.

RICHES. But—

MISERY. I will not live alone. I choose gold for one of my companions. [Holding hand out] Gold! Give me of your gold.

RICHES All my gold?

MISERY Not all. I take with prudence that I may take often. If you would have me release Master Death—gold! Think of your inheritance, and spare of your present gold in reverence to the masterdom of Misery.

DEATH. Give!

RICHES. Easy for you to say "Give!" when it is mine!

DEATH In the end, Master Riches, it is mine. Give!

RICHES [fitting purse to MISERY]. This marks my pleasure in my father's death.

MISERY [clunking purse; chuckling]. First-fruits of many joyous days for Master Misery. It is a good bargain I have made with Death. I give your worship leave to come down.

DEATH [descending] I am overdue in many places.

RICHES. My father first, Master Death. My suffering—

MISERY. Suffering, wealthy father

[DEATH nods acquiescence to RICHES, and they turn to go, RICHES eagerly leading. SCOLD enters from hut with an axe.]

SCOLD. Cut the tree down, and so—— [Sees DEATH.]

Oh!

MISERY. Ha, vixen, would you cheat me thus? Cut down my tree if you like. Misery is lord of life. Oh, the wondrous wine of knowing I alone in all the world shall live for ever!

DEATH [from hedge entrance]. Not alone.

MISERY [holding up purse]. No Gold and I——

DEATH. And Scold your wife. Man and wife you shall live.

MISERY. My wife! Scold!

DEATH. I shall come neither for you nor her.

MISERY. Oh, diddling Death! False, juggling cheater!

There is no justice in the world

DEATH. But there is Death—for others.

[Exeunt RICHES and DEATH]

[MISERY sinks in utter dejection to the ground, dropping the purse. SCOLD snatches the purse. MISERY scrambles up, and they are struggling for the purse as the curtain falls.

# QUEER STREET

By JOHN DONALD KELLY

## CHARACTERS

BILL HART, *a burglar*

LIZA HART, *his wife*

EDITH HART, *their daughter*

ALBERT SMITH, *Edith's young man*

JOE SMART, *Bill Hart's partner in  
crime*

A DETECTIVE, *in plain clothes*

## QUEER STREET<sup>1</sup>

*The scene is the sitting-room of a house in London, wherein MR WILLIAM HART, known to his intimates as "Bill," resides in perfect happiness with his wife ELIZABETH and his daughter EDITH.*

*MR HART, we regret to say is a burglar, and carries on a lucrative, if somewhat perilous, trade with the assistance and co-operation of a certain MR JOE SMART.*

*When the curtain rises MRS HART is placidly reading a novel, but MR HART, with a bag of tools at his feet, is more practically employed in examining a brace and bit. It would never occur to you that he is a burglar, for he is neither furtive nor sly-looking, on the contrary, he has a pleasant and rather humorous face. He looks carefree; but alas! a small cloud, unknown to MR HART, is hovering on his horizon a cloud that is destined to grow larger before the night is out, and to overcast his life for a brief but trying spell. The cloud is EDITH'S doing.*

*The room is pleasantly furnished. A table stands near the back, with two chairs behind it and one at the right side, which MRS HART at the moment occupies. MR HART is seated D L C, and other chairs are distributed about the room. A window at the back overlooks the street, and L C a door communicates with the hall. Another door, R C, leads to the kitchen.*

*MRS HART lays down her book*

<sup>1</sup> Separate copies of this play may be obtained from Messrs Gowans and Gray Ltd., 58 Cadogan Street, Glasgow. Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

174 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

MRS HART Goin' out again to-night, Bill?

MR HART Yus, Liza. Joe an' me's got a job on to-night. One ov them there new 'ouses wiv roses round the door an' "Welcome" on the mat. Joe's comin' round at eleven.

MRS HART When will you be 'ome?

MR HART Well, ov course that depends

MRS HART [her breath catching a little] Depends on whether you're copped or not?

MR HART [laying down his tool] There, there Liza. Joe an' me 'asn't been copped yet an' we've no reason to expect we're goin' to start to-night. [He pauses and reflects] Although last night—

MRS HART [smirking] Wot 'appened last night, Bill?

MR HART Nothing.

MRS HART [persistently] Wot 'appened last night, Bill?

MR HART [troubled] Joe left 'is cap in the 'ouse we were in.

MRS HART [agitated] Oh, Bill, they'll trace you.

MR HART [recovering his composure] No fear ov that, Liza. Joe ses there was nothin' on 'is cap to trace us by.

MRS HART [still agitated] They might put the blood- 'ounds on you.

MR HART 'Ere, Liza, wot 'ave you been readin'? It ain't like you to be talkin' like that.

MRS HART. I can't 'elp it, Bill. [She rises, and stands in front of the table] I likes you so much.

MR HART [touched] An', strike me pink, I likes you too, Liza. [He moves towards her] Honest I do. [His arm steals round her shoulder] You're as young-lookin' as the day you promised to love, honour, an' obey me. [He rummulates] Love, honour, an' obey. That's wot you said, you know.

MRS HART I was excited, Bill.

MR HART [rubbing] I think you must 'ave been. I likes you in that dress, Liza. Real silk, ain't it? [He returns to his chair] I gave you that out ov the gold cigar-box.

MRS HART No, Bill Out ov the Georgian tea service  
 MR HART So it was

*[At this point EDITH enters the room. She is a pretty girl, and neatly dressed. Her entrance creates a strained atmosphere, of which MR HART is blissfully unconscious.]*

EDITH [nervously] Hullo, Father !

MR HART 'Ullo, Edith, me gal ! Why, you're all dressed up too You an' Muvver goin' to 'ave a night out, are you ?

EDITH No We're staying in Will you be in to night, Father ?

MR HART Yus Up till eleven Joe's comin' round then

*[EDITH looks at her mother, who moves uncomfortably in her chair. EDITH goes forward, and standing behind her father, puts her arms round his neck and lowers her face to his]*

EDITH [pleadingly] Please give it up, Father

MR HART Give wot up, dear ?

EDITH The burgling

MR HART [rising] Give up burglin' ? Beginnin' to get ashamed ov yer old father, are you ? 'Ere, there's somethin' mysterious about this First yer Muvver gets anxious about me, then you asks me to give it up, an' ye're both dressed fit to kill There's somethin' in the air, an' I wants to know wot it is [There is an uncomfortable silence] Come on, now ! Wot is it ?

MRS HART Tell 'im, Edith

EDITH No You tell him, Mother

MRS HART [uncertain as to how the news will be received] Edith's—got engaged

MR HART [pleasantly surprised] Got engaged ? Who to ?

MRS HART Albert Smith

MR HART [tutting] Smith ? I've 'eard that name before [He lifts the brace and bit] Wot's 'e do ?

[There is another pause]

MRS HART Tell 'im, Edith

EDITH No You tell him Mother

MRS HART [blurted out the guilty secret] Albert's—a policeman

MR HART [as the brace and bit go clattering to the floor and he gets to his feet] A wot?

EDITH [taking courage] A policeman

MR HART Is this a joke?

EDITH I don't know what it is, but it's true, any way

MR HART [a doubt arising in his mind] Ow long 'ave you known 'im?

EDITH Not very long

MR HART [suspicion growing] You didn't meet 'im to-day for the first time, did you?

EDITH What do you take me for?

MR HART Never you mind wot I takes you for 'As 'e ever said anythin' about a cap?

EDITH Never

MR HART [sitting] Well, that's all right Edith, I never told you before, but the night you was born I walked under a ladder, I spilled the salt, I broke a mirror, an' I saw the moon through glass

MRS HART [mappily] Nothing 'appened then, did it?

MR HART No But it's 'appened now, 'asn't it? [He turns to EDITH] Wot did you go an' get engaged to a policeman for?

EDITH Because I love him

MR HART Love a policeman? Blimey! [He rises] I'm goin' out

EDITH You can't Albert's coming round specially to see you

MR HART [alarmed] Wot's 'e want to see me for?

MRS HART 'E's comin' round to ask your consent

MR HART. 'E can ask till 'e's blinkin' well blue in the face, an' 'e'll never get it. Wot'll 'e say when 'e knows I'm a burglar?

EDITH. He'll never know. I told him you were a plumber.

MR HART. A plumber? An' wot do I know about plumbin'?

MRS HART. You don't need to, Bill. If 'e asks you anythin' about your trade just talk intelligent-like about pipes an' leaks. [The door-bell rings.] There's the bell.

EDITH. It's Albert. You'll be nice to him, won't you, Father?

*[Father does not answer, his chief concern at the moment being to get his tools out of sight. EDITH goes to open the door]*

MR HART. Wot are they takin' all the time about, Liza? [Then, hopefully] P'raps it isn't 'im.

MRS HART [who has been at the door to listen]. Yes, it is. I 'eard 'em.

MR HART. Wot were they sayin'?

MRS HART [knowingly]. They weren't sayin' anything.

*[EDITH returns with ALBERT, who is in plain clothes. They both look bashful.]*

EDITH. Mother, this is Albert.

MRS HART. How are you, Albert?

ALBERT. I'm well, thank you.

EDITH. Albert, this is Father.

*[ALBERT advances on MR HART, who has been eying his future son-in-law with some uncertainty. ALBERT holds out his hand.]*

ALBERT. How are you, Mr Hart?

*[MR HART, after wiping his hand on his trousers, accepts the proffered handshake rather gingerly.]*

MR HART. I'm all right.

MRS HART. Sit here, Albert.

*[They all seat themselves, ALBERT D.L.C., and there is a silence that can almost be felt. MR HART mops his streaming brows.]*

ALBERT *[doing his best]* Cold to-night.

MR HART. I 'adn't noticed it

*[There is another silence, but slightly more prolonged. Every one looks uncomfortable]*

MRS HART *[rushing]* I think I'll go an' get supper ready.

Edith

EDITH I'll come and help you, Mother.

MR HART *[agitated]* You'll stay where you are, Edith! I musses you when you're out ov the room

*[EDITH remains, but MRS HART goes to get the supper. Another silence falls]*

ALBERT *[still doing his best]* Business brisk, Mr Hart?

MR HART *[alarmed]* Eh? *[He recovers himself]* Oh, can't complain.

ALBERT. I hear it's pretty bad all over. I was speaking to a friend to day, and he was telling me that this is one of the worst years he's had. He's a batter. Sells caps, you know.

MR HART Sells wot?

ALBERT *[loudly]* Caps

MR HART. Lumme!

ALBERT Money's so scarce that people are just wearing their old things longer.

*[MR HART's discomfiture is fortunately alleviated by the return of MRS HART with the tea-tray. In honour of her guest she has produced the silver teapot, the silver cream jug, and the silver sugar-bann. She lays the tray at the right hand end of the table.]*

MRS HART Come away, now, an' sit round. Albert, you sit 'ere beside Edith. *[She places him, and when they are all seated the party, from right to left, is, MRS HART at the*

right hand end, EDITH, ALBERT and MR HART at the left hand end] Do you take both sugar an' milk, Albert?

ALBERT Yes please

MRS HART [handing round the cups] We didn't make anythin' for supper to night Could you have taken sausages or somethin', Father?

MR HART [a picture of dejection] No I could not I'm not 'ungry

ALBERT Are you not feeling very well Mr Hart?

MR HART Me? Yus I'm splendid

ALBERT You look a bit queer

MR HART Well, you ain't too 'andsome yourself 'Ere, 'ave a scone [He places it on ALBERT's plate] Ave two scones [He gives him another

ALBERT Thanks! [Another silence falls on the company ALBERT appears to feel it, and tries a fresh line of conversation] Now, that's a nice teapot

MR HART [forgetting himself in his enthusiasm] Ain't it a lovely bit ov stuff?

ALBERT Solid silver?

MR HART Solid silver? Do you know that's worth sixty bob melted? [He realizes what he has said] Not that I'd dream ov meltin' it, mind you It's a family heirloom, that is

ALBERT [leaning over to get a better look at it] I see it's got the family crest on it

MR HART No, that ain't our crest That teapot was left me by an aunt

ALBERT She must have been a swell

MRS HART [who realizes too late that she has committed an indiscretion] No, but she worked with awells

[A glare from her spouse silences her

ALBERT I see you've got a set of it This sugar basin, now [he picks it up]—why, it's got a different crest Had the family more than one crest?

MRS HART You took off your jacket

MR HART I took off me— No, I didn't [MRS HART goes to fill the teapot at the fireplace] I lays down me tools an' I—an' I—

ALBERT [who is taking a hearty meal, with the assistance of EDITH] And you?

MR HART An' I looks at it

ALBERT What did you do then?

MR HART [rather shaky on the procedure] I—I looks at it again

ALBERT Yes?

MR HART [inspiration coming] The water was risin' on the kitchen floor There was no time to be lost [The inspiration goes] Wot should I do?

ALBERT Stop the leak

MR HART [testily] Yus, I know that But 'ow?

ALBERT How?

MR HART Guess

ALBERT [shaking his head] Can't

MR HART Fat lot ov 'elp you are I Should I solder it, or—or should I biff it one?

ALBERT You should solder it

MR HART [rashly] That's all you know As there wos no time to be lost I decides to biff it one an' solder it afterwards So I ups wiv me jemmy—

ALBERT [loudly] Your what?

[MRS HART, to add to the family's consternation drops the teapot

MR HART [with a nervous laugh] Did I say a jemmy?

ALBERT You did

MR HART That's wiv you bein' a policeman I meant me 'ammer An' wiv one mighty swipe I closed the pipe an' stopped the leak [He breathes a sigh of relief

ALBERT You knocked the pipe flat?

MR HART I knocked it flat.

182 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

ALBERT And then you soldered it?

MR HART An' then I soldered it

ALBERT How did you get the pipe open again after you had soldered it?

MR HART [dismayed] Eh?

EDITH [loudly] He said, how did you get the pipe open again after you had soldered it?

MR HART [irritated] I 'eard wot 'e said. Why does 'e keep on askin' silly questions?

EDITH It isn't a silly question. It's a good question.

MR HART It's a rotten question, an' I'm not goin' to answer it. The way plumbers open pipes after they solders 'em is a professional secret, an' I'm goin' to tell no one, so there!

ALBERT I hope I don't annoy you with my questions, Mr Hart?

MR HART [sarcastically polite] Bless you, no. I likes questions.

ALBERT I like to know about things.

MR HART I'd noticed that.

EDITH It helps you in your job, doesn't it, Albert?

ALBERT It helps me in my job. I've got ambitions, I have.

EDITH Ambitions?

ALBERT Some day I hope to be a detective.

MR HART You're that already.

ALBERT What?

MR HART A defective.

ALBERT I said a detective.

MR HART Sorry.

[He turns sideways in his chair with his back to ALBERT and proceeds to fill his pipe.]

ALBERT I've only been in the Force three years, but at the end of my second year they put me on night duty.

MR HART [hastily swallowed another bitter puff] On wot?

ALBERT Night duty

MR HART 'Strewth !

EDITH With a lantern to yourself ?

MR HART Wiv a lantern to 'imself ! You didn't think two ov 'em shared a lantern, did you ? You're about as bad as 'e is wiv your silly questions

ALBERT With a lantern and a baton

MRS HART Wot's the baton for ?

ALBERT [starting a line of conversation which has the effect of making MR HART less comfortable each moment it continues] For bitting law breakers over the head if I get into a fight

EDITH Oh, I hope you'll never get into a fight You'll be careful, won't you, Albert ?

ALBERT Don't you worry, Edith I haven't seen the burglar yet that could get the better of me Why, only last week I used my baton I was going along my beat about twelve o'clock when I saw a light in 14 Belgrave Crescent I knew the occupants were away from home, so I approached the door and found it open I entered the house and went upstairs quietly

MR HART [after a sly glance under the table] 'Aving taken your boots off

EDITH Don't interrupt ! Yes, Albert ?

ALBERT [dramatically] When I reached the top landing I saw a stream of light coming through below the door, so I tiptoed forward and peeped in Kneeling in front of a safe, with his back to me, was—a burglar

MR HART The low 'ound !

ALBERT [rising] I entered the room He didn't hear me

MR HART 'E was deaf

ALBERT 'E was deaf— No I entered so quietly I crept towards him, and [demonstrating on MR HART] I grabbed him by the collar—like that !

MR HART [who has nearly jumped through the ceiling]

from his pocket and holds it aloft] I've got the plans 'ere, Bill [Agonized gestures from BILL to acquaint JOE of ALBERT's presence only provoke airy waves of the hand in response] We needn't start till eleven D'you remember the job we did at Putney? Well, you'll roar wiv laughter when I tell you

MR HART [moving over] 'Ere, steady, Joe, steady! Allow me to introduce you to Mr Albert Smith Mr Smith—Mr Smart Albert, I may say, is Edith's bloke

EDITH My fiancy, Father

MR HART Yus, 'er fiancy An' I may also say—an' I 'opes you're listenin', Joe—that Albert is—a policeman

JOE [appalled] A wot?

MR HART A policeman Smile, Joe, smile One ov the noble police ov which we are all so proud Shake 'ands, Joe [They do so] That's right Furthermore, Joe, it's a matter ov great gratification to 'er muvver an' me to welcome 'im into the family circle A policeman in the 'ome will go a long way towards brightenin' things up

JOE So it will

MR HART It will introduce variety, an' you'll be interested to know, Joe, that Albert is on night duty

JOE No!

MR HART Yus . Say somethin'

JOE 'Ow pleasant it will be for you to come 'ome an' find a nice policeman sittin' at the fire!

[Here ALBERT lays a friendly hand on JOE's shoulder, with alarming consequences]

MR HART Won't it be lovely? Sittin' there like a little ray ov sunshine We've never 'ad a policeman in the family before Me, Joe—an' I 'opes you're listenin'—me, Joe—bein' a plumber—a plumber I said, Joe—

ALBERT Is he deaf?

MR HART No, 'e ain't deaf, but sometimes 'e's a little slow at pickin' things up Me, Joe, bein' a plumber—

186 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO DAY

wot mends leaks, you know—I 'aven't 'ad much to do WIT the police, an'—well, it'll be a nice change

JOE *[a little weak at the knees]* So it will I think I'll sit down, if you don't mind

*[He sits down D.L., and BILL sits down D.R. MR HART and MARY, who have been clearing the table carry things out. ALBERT sits behind the table. There is a brief silence.]*

ALBERT *[to JOE a dormouse]* Mr Smart said something about plans when he came in. What's your business, Mr Smart?

JOE I'm a—a—

MR HART *[the grimes]* Mr Smart's an arkyuck.

JOE I'm a wot?

MR HART An arkyuck, Joe—wot designs 'ouses *[He turns to ALBERT]* 'Im an' me does a lot ov work together

ALBERT I gathered that from what he said about the job you did at Putney

MR HART Yes, you would 'F designs the 'ores an' I designs the pipes

ALBERT I think he said you were going to a job to-night

MR HART Well, we did 'ave that intention

ALBERT Eleven o'clock's a bit late for a job, isn't it?

MR HART *[together]* Late? This is a special rushed

JOE job

ALBERT I've never seen the plans of a house. Could I see your plans, Mr Smart?

*[JOE, in a quandary, looks pleadingly at MR HART.]*

MR HART Give 'em to me, Joe, an' I'll explain them. *[He takes the plans from JOE.]* Albert's got a thirst for knowledge that puts the Sahara's thirst for water into the shade. *[He stands behind ALBERT and unrolls the plans on the table.]* See that?

ALBERT Yes.

MR HART That's the front door, an' these two squares are windows

ALBERT What's the cross at that window for?

MR HART [with a triumphant wink at JOE] That's to remind us to put a stained glass window in there This 'ere's the road

ALBERT What are these arrows along the road for?

MR HART [at a loss] Wot are these arrows along the road for again, Joe?

JOE [forgetting himself] Shows the policeman's beat

MR HART Yus Shows the policeman's beat—— No, it don't Joe will 'ave 'is little joke, won't you, Joe? [JOE nods dumbly] These arrows are a—a secret

ALBERT What's this?

EDITH [re entering] Perhaps I'm interrupting you

MR HART You are, Edith, thank 'eaven Now I think you two young people should go into the kitchen You'll ave a lot to talk about, an' I'm sure Albert will 'ave a lot ov questions to ask [MR HART laughs jovially as EDITH and ALBERT, suitably coy, leave by the right hand door As the door closes on them the laugh evaporates, and JOE fixes a concentrated gaze on MR HART] Wotcher lookin' at me for? I couldn't elp it [He resumes his seat] Blimey, you'd think I'd chosen 'im

JOE 'As 'e been in long?

MR HART Too blinkin' long

JOE Did 'e say anythin' about a cap?

MR HART Yus, 'e mentioned one in a sort ov off'and way

JOE Did 'e? I was just thinkin'——

MR HART Don't, Joe You'll 'urt yourself

JOE I was just thinkin', Bill, I'm in Queer Street, right enough

MR HART You are, Joe Number one Queer Street, an' I'm shatin' the 'ouse wiv you [JOE rises] Where are you goin', Joe?

## 188 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

JOE [moving towards the window] Over to the window to cool me 'ead [He looks out, and suddenly his body becomes rigid] Bill!

MR HART Wot?

JOE Come 'ere, Bill!

MR HART [moving over] Wot's up?

JOE Look, Bill! Down there in the street Wot's that?

MR HART [looking out] Wot's wot? Blimey, Joe, it's a plain clothes cop

JOE 'E's lookin' up 'ere, Bill

MR HART So 'e is Wot's that 'e's got in 'is 'and?

JOE Bill, it looks like a cap! 'Ere, I'm goin'

MR HART [catching him] Steady, Joe steady! It may not be a cap You sdn't your name an' address on it, 'ad you?

JOE No Bill, it was plain; but they may 'ave traced us wiv a blood-'ound

MR HART [startled] 'Ere, you an' Liza must be members ov the same revolvin' library

JOE There's a blood-'ound, Bill!

MR HART Where? [He gives Joe a disgusted start] That's a Pomeranian ov them there little dogs.

JOE Bill, I've got an idea!

MR HART Don't be funny

JOE Strewnth, Bill, I 'ave When 'e comes up—we'll 'ide

MR HART 'Ow long did it take you ter think ov that?

JOE But wait! We'll get Albert to interview 'im. We'll tell Albert 'e's a business rival that we don't want to see, you see, an' when 'e knows Albert's a policeman, you see, it'll throw 'im off 'is guard, you see, an' 'e'll go away, you see!

MR HART [holding out his hand] Put it there, Joe! They say every one 'as a good idea once in their lives, an' you're 'ad yours.

JOE Bill, who'll let 'im in ?

MR HART We'll leave the door on the latch

*[He disappears L. for a moment to do so]*

JOE [looking out] 'E's comin' across the road, Bill

MR HART Come on, Joe ! Quick !

*[The conspirators retreat precipitately right. The room is empty until the left hand door swings open and the plain clothes DETECTIVE comes in. He makes a rapid survey of the room, then, hearing a sound, he flattens himself against the wall behind the right hand door. ALBERT enters, and when he reaches the centre of the room the heavy hand of the law falls on his shoulder.]*

DETECTIVE Gotcha !

ALBERT There's some mistake

DETECTIVE There's no mistake, me lad. I've been looking for you for a week. Albert Smith, I arrest you for a robbery in 14 Belgrave Crescent, an' I gives you the usual warning that anything you say may be used in evidence against you. Where's your coat ?

ALBERT It's outside

DETECTIVE Come on, then

ALBERT Wait a minute I want to say good bye first.

DETECTIVE Who to ?

ALBERT My gal [He calls] Edith !

*[EDITH enters, and stands amazed]*

EDITH Albert, what is it ? [She calls] Father !

*[MR HART, after a cautious glance round the door, joins the company. MRS HART follows]*

MR HART Wot's all this about ? Wot are you 'oldin' 'im for ?

DETECTIVE In case 'e gets away 'E's a burglar, this young man is, an' the sooner you knows it the better

MR HART Wait a minute [He goes to the door and calls] Joe-o-e ! You can come in [JOE, a little uncertain, also

*joins the company. He stands beside MR HART.]* Joe, we've 'ad bad news [JOE, misconstruing the information, holds out his hands, back upward, ready to have the handcuffs slipped on MR HART promptly knocks JOE's hands down, and, in a voice which does its best to tremble with emotion, says] Albert's—a burglar

JOE 'E said 'e was a policeman on night duty  
MR HART [more in sorrow than in anger] 'E told us a lie!

JOE Oh, Albert!

ALBERT I thought perhaps you'd never know the truth.  
Edith, will you wait for me?

EDITH [through her sobs] Yes, I'll wait for you

ALBERT [to the DETECTIVE] I'm ready now

DETECTIVE Come on then

ALBERT [turning at the door] Mr Hurt!

MR HART [with dignity] Yes?

ALBERT I'm sorry for deceiving you

[The door closes on him for six months at least]

MR HART [expressing a sentiment with which JOE is in cordial agreement] The blinkin' 'ypocrite!

CURTAIN

# THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE

*By W. W. JACOBS and  
HERBERT C. SARGENT*

*Adapted from W. W. Jacobs' story of that title*

## CHARACTERS

*MRS WATERS, landlady at the  
Beehive*

*GEORGE BENN, an ex boatswain*

*NED TRAVERS, a retired soldier*

## THE BOATSWAIN'S MATE<sup>1</sup>

SCENE The bar at the Beehive Inn L C is a counter, behind which is a door opening into sitting room There is a wide, low window up R C and a door up L C which when open discloses a view of a garden R C is a door opening on to the road There is a large cupboard D R and a table c Chairs on either side of table and round room Time, 10 P M

MRS WATERS is discovered behind the counter BENN is standing in front of the counter MRS WATERS is a pretty, buxom woman of thirty BENN is a short, thick set man of over fifty

BENN There's one thing, Mrs Waters, that I've told you times out of number, and I tells you again, solemn and emphatic, and that is no matter 'ow many times you refuse me my feelings'll never change

MRS WATERS [significantly] Nor mine either

BENN Can't you give me any 'ope?

[Pushes empty mug towards her

MRS WATERS [petulantly; pushing mug back] No, nor beer either It's a strange thing, Mr Benn, but you always ask me to marry you after the third mug

BENN It's only to get my courage up Next time I'll do it afore I 'ave a drop, that'll prove to you I'm in earnest, p'raps [He moves towards door R Brokenly] Good night, Mrs Waters I'm pained and 'urt at your insinuation that three mugs—or thirty, for the matter o'

<sup>1</sup> Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand London W C 2 or 25 West 45th Street New York

that—coul I alter my feelings towards you Good night,  
the am

MRS WATTERS. Stop a moment Mr Benn

BENN [coming back quickly] Then there is 'ope?

MRS WATTERS. No but you can do me a favour

BENN. Anything for you

MRS WATTERS. My girl's gone to stop the night at her  
mother's, so there's no one to mind the bar while I get  
my supper. I'll rap you—

BENN. Is that all? I 'oped it was something that'd give  
me a h'opportunity to show you 'ow much I—

MRS WATTERS [cutting here short] There! I want my  
supper. Help yourself, Mr Benn, while I'm gone. I  
shan't be long. [Exit L, into sitting room

[BENN turns his hand to the closed door. He raps  
loudly, then lifts flap of counter and takes up his  
position behind

BENN. 'Up myself! [Sighs] I don't want any beer,  
I've lost the relish for it. [In an absent minded manner he  
drives a mug of beer while he is talking] Some 'ow it seems  
to choke me. I suppose it's love. If I could only show 'er  
some 'ow what a chance she's missing. [He gazes at the  
mug of beer with a surprised expression] Mind a wanderin',  
I suppose. Any 'ow, it's a pity to waste it

[Rouses it to his lips as NED TRAVERS enters R. TRAVERS  
is a tall, erect man of about thirty-eight. He  
betrays his military training in his carriage. He  
carries a small bundle

TRAVERS. Evening, guv'nor

BENN. Evenin'.

TRAVERS. Pint o' four, please

[BENN drives the beer and hands it to TRAVERS, who  
pays for it

BENN. Fine night.

TRAVERS. Yes, but dry. [Drunks beer] Here's luck

BENN [drinking] Same to you

TRAVERS [looking round] Cosy little place you've got

BENN Cosy enough, but it ain't mine

TRAVERS Aren't you the boss?

BENN No, friend o' mine A widder She's the boss  
I'm on'y minding the bar for 'er.

TRAVERS Sly dog

BENN [annoyed] Eh?

TRAVERS No offence, no offence

BENN Granted, but there *is* subjects that—

TRAVERS I understand 'Ave you such a thing as a pipe  
o' baccy, mate?

BENN [handing him a metal box] 'Elp yourself

TRAVERS Thanks

BENN Lobster, ain't you?

TRAVERS Was Now I'm my own commander in-  
chief

BENN [taking box and filling his own pipe] Padding it?

TRAVERS That looks like it?

[Holds up a foot encased in a dilapidated boot

BENN [pointing to a chair by the table in bar] 'Ave a  
rest

TRAVERS [sitting] I've got plenty of time

BENN [looking at TRAVERS from behind the counter, aside] Wonder if 'e'd do it? 'E looks a likely chap, and 'e's down on 'is luck I'll try 'im, any'ow [To TRAVERS] 'Ave another? [TRAVERS hesitates] With me

TRAVERS Don't mind if I do [Sits L of table BENN  
drives two mugs of beer and carries them to table] You  
seem quite at home here

BENN [sighs] Wish I was [Drinks] 'Ere's another  
kind love

TRAVERS [drinks] And many of 'em.

BENN Lookin' for a job, mate?

TRAVERS. Been lookin' for one till my eyes ache

TRAVERS [resignedly] We're both drunk, that's what it is

BENN If you don't agree, mum's the word and no 'arm done [Offers his hand to TRAVERS, who takes it]

TRAVERS Mum's the word My name's Ned Travers, and, barring cells for a spree now and again, there's nothing against it Mind that

BENN Might 'appen to anybody [Offers tobacco box] Now fill your pipe, and don't go chucking good tobacco away agin [Scrapes floor with foot]

TRAVERS [picking up the plug which he had thrown away and putting it in pipe before refilling it from the box] Let's hear what you want done

BENN I ain't got it all shipshape and proper yet, but it's in my mind's eye It's been there off and on like for some time

TRAVERS Kind of hatching

BENN That's it—'atching [Shakes hands] Now listen This 'ere little public-ouse, the Beehive, is kept by a lady—

TRAVERS A widow, you told me

BENN So I did Well, to cut it short, she's the lady wot I've got my eye on

TRAVERS I thought as much

BENN She won't 'ave me

[Looks at TRAVERS in mournful surprise]

TRAVERS She's got no taste

BENN [thoughtfully] S'pose that's what it is She's a lone widder, and the Beehive is in a lonely place Why, it's 'arf a mile to the nearest 'ouse from 'ere

TRAVERS Silly place for a pub

BENN I've been telling 'er 'ow unsafe it is

TRAVERS Wants a man on the premises to protect 'er—or a dog

BENN A dog's no good

BENN Ain't over and above fond o' work, I s'pose?

TRAVERS I love it, but we can't have all we want in this world, [privately] it wouldn't be good for us

BENN Would—would 'arf a quid be any good to you?

TRAVERS [sternly, rising] Look here, just because I asked you for a pipe o' baccy—

BENN No offence no offence I mean, if you earned it?

TRAVERS What's the job? [Resignedly] Gardening and windows, I suppose

BENN [stealthily, and looking at door behind her] No

TRAVERS [sitting down again] Scrubbing, p'raps? Last house I scrubbed out I did it so thoroughly they accused me of poaching the soap Damn 'em!

BENN And you didn't?

TRAVERS [sitting and knocking the ashes out of his pipe] I can't give it back to you, because I've smoked some of it, and I can't pay you for it, because I've only got twopence, and that I want for myself [Goes towards door R] So long matey, and next time a poor devil asks you for a pipe be civil

BENN [running after him and taking his arm] I never see such a man for taking offence in all my born days I had my reasons for that remark, mate Good reasons they was

TRAVERS [picking up his bundle] I dare say

BENN 'Ere me out.

TRAVERS [reseating himself R. of table, BENN L. of table] Oh, all right Fire away!

BENN [glancing towards door L. again and leaning towards him] I spoke of 'arf a quid just now, and when I tell you that I offer it to you to do a bit o' burgling you'll see 'ow necessary it is for me to be certain of your honesty

TRAVERS Burgling? Honesty? 'Strewth! Are you drunk, or am I?

BENN Meaning, for you to pretend to be a burglar

TRAVERS [resignedly] We're both drunk, that's what it is

BENN If you don't agree, mum's the word and no 'arm done [Offers his hand to TRAVERS, who takes it

TRAVERS Mum's the word My name's Ned Travers, and, barring cells for a spree now and again, there's nothing against it Mind that

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BENN I've been telling 'er 'ow unsafe it is

TRAVERS Wants a man on the premises to protect 'er—or a dog

BENN A dog's no good

TRAVERS I don't see why not When I was in South Africa—

BENN P'raps you don't, but stick to the point As I was saying you wait outside for me Directly I come out she'll shut up and go to bed Then we wait a bit, and—

TRAVERS Not me I've a chance of a job to-morrow at Luton, that means a twelve-mile tramp I can't hang about here

BENN [continuing] We wait a bit, and—

TRAVERS What's the use? We can't get a drink if she's shut up

BENN [sharply] I wish you'd shut up and listen We wait a bit, then I take you round the back there [Pointing at window up R C] and put you through that winder

TRAVERS [starting] Eh! Oh, do you, though?

BENN You goes upstairs and alarms 'er, and she screams like—er—screams for 'elp

TRAVERS Screams for help? Look here—

BENN I'm watching the 'ouse, faithful like, and 'ear 'er scream I dashes in at the winder, knocks you down, and rescues 'er [Smiling and shaking his head tenderly] She clings to me in 'er gratitood, and, proud of my strength and pluck, she marries me

TRAVERS An' I get a five years' honeymoon Good night, mate Good night [Turns R]

BENN [pulling TRAVERS back] Don't be so 'asty I've arranged for all that

TRAVERS That was thoughtful of you

BENN In the excitement of the moment you spring up and escape You can run much faster than I can, anyways, you will The nearest 'ouse is 'arf a mile off, and 'er servant's staying till to morrow at 'er mother's, ten miles away

TRAVERS [moving across to door R] Well, so long, mate! Thanks for amusing me.

100 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

BENY [blankly] You won't do it?

TRIVERS. No, I'm hanged if I do. [Coming C. to BENY] Accidents will happen, even in the best regulated burglaries; then where should I be?

BENY If they did I'd own up and clear you

TRIVERS. You might, and then again you mightn't. So long, mate!

BENY [eagerly] I—I'll make it two quid. I've took a fancy to you; you're just the man for the job.

TRIVERS [doubtfully] Thanks

BENY [taking him by the arm] Look 'ere I'll give it you in writing. Come, you ain't faint-hearted? Why, a bluejacket 'ud do it for the fun of the thang.

TRIVERS. Then get one to do it. Good night.

{Worries to door R.

BENY [pulling TRIVERS back] If I give it to you in writing, and there should be an accident, it's worse for me than it is for you, ain't it?

TRIVERS. I won't worrying about you

BENY. I give you the two quid afore you come into the 'ouse. I'd give 'em to you now if I'd got 'em with me. That's my confidence in you. I likes the look of you Soldier or sailor, when there's a man's work to be done give 'em to me before anybody.

TRIVERS. But where can you get the money from if you haven't got it on you?

BENY. Don't you worry. I'll manage that. I've got a wonderful 'ead. [Removes hat]

TRIVERS [looking at him] You have. [Seating himself] Go on, write it out fair and square and sign it, and I'm your man.

BENY [sitting down L. of table. Clapping TRIVERS on the shoulder] Bravo, matey! [Taking a bundle of papers from his pocket] There's letters there with my name and address on 'em. It's all fair, square, and above-board.

When you've cast your eyes over 'em I'll give you the writing

TRAVERS [standing at R of table, taking letters] That's what I call businesslike [Turns over the envelopes] BENN takes a pencil from his pocket and writes laboriously] 'Ullo! no stamp on this one You had to pay twopence Careless girl, that I should talk to her

BENN [glancing up] Wasn't a girl

TRAVERS Oh! Now judging by the writing—

BENN [looking up, in a very worried manner] No no, it wasn't a girl But for 'eaven's sake don't interrupt! You've made me spell 'notice' with only one t as it is

TRAVERS Sorry, mate I won't say another word

BENN [after writing a few words] 'Ow many u's in burglar?

TRAVERS It's either one or two, but I ain't certain which

BENN I've put two, so I'm on the safe side

TRAVERS [walking over to window up R.C. and looking out] Yes, you'll be on the safe side all through this job That'll be the outside [Points to the window]

BENN [looking up from his writing] Eh, what? Were you speaking to me?

TRAVERS No, only thinking out loud

BENN I've finished [Hands paper to TRAVERS with a complacent air] There! Read that

[Rises from chair and crosses L]

TRAVERS [c. ; reading, and placing the paper in his pocket] Seems all right. You ought to have been a lawyer

BENN Not bad for a amateur, eh?

TRAVERS No, it's—

BENN [listening] 'Ush!

TRAVERS Eh?

BENN I can 'ear 'er moving Clear out quick, and wait for me round the corner She mustn't see you

TRAVERS Right you are [Takes up bundle] I'm off

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TRAVERS [doubtfully] Thanks

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TRAVERS Then get one to do it. Good night.

[Motions to door L.]

BENY [pulling TRAVERS back] If I give it to you in writing, and there should be an accident, it's worse for me than it is for you, ain't it?

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TRAVERS But where can you get the money from if you haven't got it on you?

BENY Don't you worry. I'll manage that. I've got a wonderful 'ead [Removes hat]

TRAVERS [looking at him] You have [Seating himself] Go on, write it out fair and square and sign it, and I'm your man.

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[Rises from chair and crosses L]

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BENN [listening] 'Ush!

TRAVERS Eh?

BENN I can 'ear 'er moving Clear out quick, and wait for me round the corner She mustn't see you

TRAVERS Right you are [Takes up bundle] I'm off

[Goes out R.C. *He closes door, then reopens it and puts his head in*] You won't forget to fetch that two quid?

BENNY [anxiously] No, no! Get out!

[TRAYERS closes door R.C. as MRS. WATERS enters L.C.]

MRS. WATERS I hope you're not tired of waiting, Mr Benn. Has anyone been in? I thought I heard voices.

BENNY [taking mugs off table and putting them on counter] Yes, one chap, sort of tramp. Looked a wrong un.

MRS. WATERS. We get plenty of tramps along here, poor fellers.

BENNY And you're unprotected.

MRS. WATERS I'm not nervous.

BENNY Supposin' that chap who was 'ere just now took it into 'is 'ead to break in to-night? What's to prevent 'im?

MRS. WATERS I do believe you're trying to frighten me. Good night, Mr Benn. I must shut up now.

BENNY I'll 'elp you. I'll fasten the window. [Pretends to fasten the window, but, unseen by MRS. WATERS, opens it so that TRAYERS can get in. He pulls down the blind over the open window.] Er—er—could you oblige me with a loan of two pounds for a day or two, Mrs Waters? I've 'ad a rather sudden—

MRS. WATERS. Certainly!

[Takes a cash box from behind the counter]

BENNY I'll give you an IOU for it.

[Crosses to counter L.]

MRS. WATERS. Nonsense! I can trust you with anything, Mr Benn.

BENNY [sighing] Except yourself. [Leans over counter]

MRS. WATERS [laughing] Now don't start again. [Gives him the money] Here's the money. I hope it's for a good object.

BENNY The best object in the world.

MRS. WATERS. Well, good night, it's a very late

BENN Good night, Mrs Waters, and thank you. Don't forget I'm always ready if you do alter your mind.

[Exit R.C.]

[MRS WATERS locks both doors. Takes cash box from behind the counter]

MRS WATERS I suppose some women would be afraid to be left in this lonely house. Thank goodness I don't suffer from nerves. I wonder what Mr Benn wanted that two pounds for? I hope he's not going to buy an engagement ring on the chance of me changing my mind. [Laughs, takes lamp from table] I shall be glad to get to bed, I can hardly keep my eyes open.

[She goes out L., taking the lamp with her]

[The stage is in darkness for a few moments. Then the heads of BENN and TRAVERS are seen silhouetted against the white blind over window up R.C. It is a bright moonlight night so that all their movements can be clearly seen. TRAVERS pulls the blind aside and peers cautiously into the room. When the blind is pulled back the stage is lighted by the moon shining in at the window]

TRAVERS Seems quiet. [Climbs half way into the room. He turns to BENN, who is pushing him from behind] Not so hard, I don't want to dive in.

[He cautiously climbs into the room]

[BENN puts his head in at the window]

BENN [hoarsely] 'Ow do you feel?

TRAVERS I'm all right. I feel as if I'd been burgling all my life. How about you?

BENN Nervous.

TRAVERS What, a bosun nervous? Buck up, mate!

BENN [handing him two pound notes] 'Ere's the two quids.

TRAVERS Where did you get 'em? Why, you don't mean to say you borrowed 'em from her?

TRAVERS Not me, not before reconnoitering a bit  
When I was in South Africa—

BENN [impatiently] We'll 'ave the yarn some other time  
mate Come, 'urry up and get this over It's upsettin  
my narves

TRAVERS There's no hurry "Slow and sure's" my  
motto

BENN You're acting up to the fust part of it, any ow

TRAVERS If you stop chattering there and wagglung my  
boots about how can I get on with it?

BENN I'm off I don't want to interfere I'll wait at  
the bottom of the garden You're doing this job, not me  
[Goes away from window

TRAVERS I am, and I wish I wasn't Don't want  
him hanging about [Pulls down blind] But here goes  
I do hope she won't have a fit [He goes towards the door  
L.C.] I suppose I go through here to get to the stairs  
[In opening the flap in the counter he upsets a mug which  
falls to the floor] Deuce take it! I've done it now  
[He stands listening for a moment] I don't hear nothing  
Heavy sleeper, perhaps [He goes to the door L.C. and opens  
it] Benn'll think I'm lost if I don't— By Jove she's  
coming! And she's got a gun!

[Makes a half run to window, then crouches and runs  
to table Then he gets into the cupboard D.R.  
as MRS WATERS enters L.C. She carries a candle  
and a double barrelled gun She is in her night-  
dress She looks round the room, then slowly  
walks towards the cupboard in a casual manner

MRS WATERS Must have been my fancy, I suppose, or a  
rat, perhaps [She edges towards the cupboard as she speaks  
and turns the key] Got you! Keep still! If you try and  
break out I shall shoot you [L. of table

TRAVERS [hastily] All right Don't shoot! I won't  
move

MRS WATERS. Better not. Mind, I've got a gun pointing straight at you

TRAVERS. Point it downward, there's a good girl, and take your finger off the trigger. If anything happened to me you'd never forgive yourself

MRS WATERS. It's all right so long as you don't move, and I'm not a girl

TRAVERS. Yes, you are. I saw you. I thought it was an angel at first. I saw your bare ankles and——

MRS WATERS. How—how dare you!

TRAVERS. You'll catch cold

MRS WATERS. Don't trouble about me

TRAVERS. I won't give you any trouble. I'll go quiet. Why don't you call for help?

MRS WATERS. I don't want your advice. I know what to do. Now, don't you try and break out. I'm going to fire one barrel out of the window, but I've got the other one for you if you move

TRAVERS. My dear girl, you'll alarm the neighbourhood

MRS WATERS. Just what I want to do. [Rattles the door up L.C.] Keep still, mind! If you move——

TRAVERS. Stop! Don't do anything rash. Don't do anything you'd be sorry for afterwards. I'm not a burglar. I'm doing this for a friend of yours—Mr Benn

MRS WATERS. Mr Benn!

TRAVERS. True as I stand here. Here, I'll show you my instructions. I'll put 'em through the door

[Pushes the paper through the door

[MRS WATERS puts gun on table and goes round table to door. She seizes the paper and reads aloud

MRS WATERS. "This is to give notice that I, George Benn, being of sound mind and body, have told Ned Travers to pretend to be a burglar at Mrs Waters. He ain't a burglar, and I shall be outside all the time. It's all above board and shipshape. Signed, George Benn."

TRAVERS Nicely worded ain't it?

MRS. WATERS Sound mind—above board—ship-shape! Where is he?

TRAVERS Out at the back. If you go to the window you can see him. Blow out the candle first or he'll see you.

*[She goes up to window and back to table. She blows out candle. Then she goes to window up R.C. and lifts a corner of the blind.]*

MRS. WATERS I see him standing right on my carna-  
tions.

TRAVERS The coward!

MRS. WATERS You both ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You ought to be punished.

TRAVERS There is a clothes peg sticking into my back.

MRS. WATERS I hope it'll be a lesson to you.

TRAVERS It will. A hard one. What are you going to do?

MRS. WATERS Oh!

*[She hastily wraps herself in a mackintosh that is hanging on a peg behind door up L.C.]*

TRAVERS Yes. You ought to have done that before It's enough to give you your death of cold.

MRS. WATERS *[sharply]* Mind your own business! *[Walks up and down in thought.]* Now if I let you out will you promise to do exactly as I tell you?

TRAVERS Honour bright

MRS. WATERS I'm going to give Mr. Benn a lesson I c-  
won't forget in a hurry. I'm going to fire off this gun,  
and then run and tell him I've killed you.

TRAVERS Eh? *[Laughing]* Oh Lord!

MRS. WATERS Hush! Stop that laughing. He'll hear you. Do you hear? Be quiet!

TRAVERS Well let me out!

MRS. WATERS Wait a moment. *[She unties her hair,*

which is tied in a plait. She shakes it over her shoulders and arranges it with her hands. Before doing this she moves to the side of the cupboard, so that TRAVERS shall not see her.] Now you can come out [Unlocks the door

[TRAVERS comes out. She holds the gun ready

TRAVERS [stretching himself] I say, that was a tight fit

MRS. WATERS That's your fault. You needn't have gone in there.

TRAVERS It was the only— For heaven's sake, do point that gun away! If you knew as much about guns as I do—

MRS. WATERS All right. I'm going into the parlour. I'll fire the gun off in there. It'll sound too loud here.

TRAVERS Yes. Fire into a cushion, or something. We don't want anybody else to hear. [She goes into the sitting room.] Poor old Benn! This'll upset his 'narves.'

[The sound of the explosion is heard]

[MRS. WATERS enters and runs across to the door up L.C. She unfastens it and throws it open, and totters into the arms of BENN, who starts up R.C. She utters a shriek. TRAVERS has concealed himself in room L.]

BENN What—what's the matter? I—I 'eard a gun.

MRS. WATERS [in a tragic whisper] A burglar. But it's all right, I've killed him.

BENN You've kill—kill—killed 'im?

MRS. WATERS Yes. First shot.

BENN [moving to door up L.C.] Poor fellow—poor—

MRS. WATERS [seizing his coat] Come back!

BENN I was going to see—whether I could do anything for 'im. Poor fellow! [Moves to door again]

MRS. WATERS [pushing him back] You stay where you are. I don't want any witnesses. I don't want this house to have a bad name. I'm going to keep it quiet.

BENN Quiet? 'Ow?

MRS WATERS [*pondering and biting finger*] First thing to do is to get rid of the body, I suppose

BENN Where—where—is 'e—it?

MRS WATERS [*pointing at the ceiling*] Just over where we're standing I must move it soon, or it will spoil my ceiling [BENN *hastily moves a few feet, and looks at the ceiling apprehensively*] I'll bury him in the garden, I think [Crosses to window] There's a good piece of ground just outside [Points C] It's nice and handy, and it'll save trouble

BENN Ugh!

MRS WATERS What's the matter?

BENN [*wiping his head*] Nothing! [Shivers]

MRS WATERS You're cold It's the night air, I suppose A little digging will warm you beautifully Come, get to work. You'll find a spade in the tool-house

BENN [*absently*] A—a spade—in the tool 'ouse?

MRS WATERS And while you're digging the grave I'll go and clean up the mess

BENN [*in a dazed condition, fumbling at his collar*] Poor fellow!

MRS WATERS [*crossing and opening door up L.C.*] Come along I'll fetch the spad-

BENN [*nervously*] I—I'll come with you [As they go out up L.C.] Poor—fellow! [They go out

[TRAVERS *cautiously looks out at door L.C.*

TRAVERS She's a marvel, a'elp me, a marvel! Poor old Benn! It's fair knocked him over They're comung back. He mustn't see the corpse

[Goes back into room L as MRS WATERS and BENN are seen outside sworded up R.C. They have a pick and spade. There is a full moon, so that they can be seen clearly]

MRS WATERS This is the spot It'll spoil my flowers,

## 110 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

but it can't be helped, and perhaps they will be better next year [BERT stands spell bound] He was a tall man, so the hole must be pretty big Thank goodness, he wasn't very fat Come, don't waste time

BENNY Poor fellow!

MRS. WATERS I'll bring the body down when you've gone

BENNY Where are you going to get—it down?

MRS. WATERS Drag it downstairs Do you think I'm going to throw it out of the window?

[TRAVERS comes out of room L.C.]

BENNY Suppose I'm not dead?

MRS. WATERS Fiddlesticks! Do you think I don't know? Now, don't waste time talking It needn't be very deep I'll put a few cabbages on top, I've got more than I want.

[During the foregoing dialogue TRAVERS has cautiously made his way from the room L.C. to the window up R.C. By peering round the curtain he has seen what was passing in the garden]

BENNY [commencing to dig] Poor chap!

MRS. WATERS Do be quick! You seem quite upset! You said you'd do anything for me

BENNY So—so I will but I—I—am a bit taken aback, and I'm not used to digging graves

MRS. WATERS It's quite easy Now I'm going in I'll be back soon [She comes in and closes door up L.C. She walks across to room L.C. and looks in] Gone! [Looks round and sees TRAVERS at the window] Ah!

TRAVERS Come and look at him You're a wonder, that's what you are I've been watching from here Come and look at him.

[She goes to the window up R.C. TRAVERS struggles to get a view]

MRS. WATERS Get back! He'll see you

BENN Is—is that you, Mrs Waters?

MRS WATERS Yes, of course it is Who else should it be, do you think? Go on! What are you stopping for?

[TRAVERS stands behind MRS WATERS and peers over her shoulder]

TRAVERS Fine exercise—digging

MRS WATERS [suddenly] Look out! He'll see you

[TRAVERS, in drawing back, bumps his head against the window frame]

BENN Won't you come out 'ere, Mrs Waters? It's a bit creepy for you in there all alone

MRS WATERS I'm all right

BENN [in trembling tones] I keep fancying there's something dodging be'ind them currant bushes 'Ow you can stay there alone I can't think I thought I saw something looking over your shoulder just now Fancy if it came creeping up be'ind you and caught 'old of you!

[TRAVERS creeps up and puts his arm round MRS WATERS' waist]

MRS WATERS Oh! [Speaking in a fierce undertone] If you do that again—

TRAVERS He put it into my head I should never have thought of such a thing by myself As a rule I'm one of the quietest

MRS WATERS [turning to window] Make haste, Mr Benn, I've a lot to do when you've finished. [Turning to TRAVERS] Now you get back in there [Pointing L C] I'm going to open the door, and when I come back try to behave yourself as if you were—

TRAVERS A corpse?

MRS WATERS No, as if you were ashamed of yourself

TRAVERS I am But it's been good fun, hasn't it?

[Goes out L C

[MRS WATERS opens door up L C BENN can be seen

210 JUNIOR ONE ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

but it can't be helped and perhaps they will be better next year [BENN stands spellbound] He was a tall man so the hole must be pretty big Thank goodness, he wasn't very fat Come don't waste time.

BENN P—poor fellow !

MRS WATERS. I'll bring the body down when you've gone

BENN 'Ow are you going to get—it down ?

MRS WATERS Drag it downstairs Do you think I'm going to throw it out of the window ?

[TRAVERS comes out of room L.C.]

BENN Suppose 'e isn't dead ?

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BENN So—so I will but I—I—am a bit taken aback, and I'm not used to diggin' g—graves

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TRAVERS A corpse?

MRS WATERS No as if you were ashamed of yourself

TRAVERS I am But it's been good fun, hasn't it?

[Goes out L.C.

[MRS WATERS opens door up L.C. BENN can be seen

112 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

through the open window digging frantically  
There is a pile of earth which he has thrown up

BENNY [rubbing his brow with his arm] It's—it's 'ard work, and I keep fancying .

[Looks round nervously, starts, and drops near her

MRS. WATERS [going out and inspecting the hole] I'll finish it. I want a little exercise, and if anybody passed and saw you here it might lead to questions. Now you'd better go straight off home, and, mind, not a word to a soul about this

[She puts her hand on his shoulder. He shudders  
and drops away]

BENNY Good night. [As he moves away] Poor fellow!

[Goes down garden R.C.]

MRS. WATERS He won't want to rescue me in a hurry [Looks at the pile of earth]. Now I suppose I must fill this hole up. What an awful mess he's made!

[She picks up the spade]

[TRAVERS comes from room L.C. and looks through the  
car door]

TRAVERS Let me, it's my grave

MRS. WATERS I told you not to come out of that room; but as you're there you may as well make yourself useful. I'm coming indoors, it's cold out here without any—. with only a mackintosh on. [Comes in at door up L.C.]

TRAVERS Yes, take care of yourself, there's a good girl. Where did I put my boots?

[Lights candle and sits L. of table]

[MRS. WATERS closes door with a bang]

MRS. WATERS [L.] What awful impudence the man has! But he's not bad looking [C.] Why don't you get some settled work?

TRAVERS [putting on boots] Easier said than done. Since I took my discharge from the Army I've done all I could get—and that's precious little.

MRS WATERS You've been a soldier? I thought you were afraid of that gun I—I mean, of course, you know how—how dangerous they are, being used to them

TRAVERS Yes, I'm an old soldier. But don't you run away with the idea that I'm a beggar, because I'm not I pay my way, such as it is. And, by the by, I s'pose I haven't earned that two pounds Benn gave me?

[Rises and goes c to MRS WATERS]

MRS WATERS Two pounds? Two pounds? Won't I talk to him!

TRAVERS [taking the notes from his pocket and gazing at them regretfully] Yes, here they are

MRS WATERS Don't you think you've earned them?

TRAVERS [shaking his head] No. There, take 'em quick—[sighs] before I change my mind

MRS WATERS [regarding him closely] I'll—I'll tell him what I think of him when I'm tired of the joke

TRAVERS [as she takes the notes] Soft hand you've got I don't wonder Benn was desperate. I dare say I should have done just the same in his place. There's only one job I'm really fit for, now that I'm too old for the Army

MRS WATERS Playing at burglars?

TRAVERS Guess again

MRS WATERS Strolling about looking for work?

TRAVERS [putting arm round MRS WATERS' waist] No Landlord of a little country public-house

MRS WATERS How dare you! [Crosses R C to door Opening door R.C., gasping] Good night!

TRAVERS. Good-bye. I say, I should like to hear how old Benn takes the joke, though

MRS WATERS [slowly] Well, if you should happen to be passing this way again, and—and like to look in—perhaps I'll tell you. Good-bye [c]

TRAVERS [at door] I'll look in in two or three days' time—say, to-morrow [Taking her hand] I say! [Softly]

## 114 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

It would be an awful joke if he came here and found me landlord. I'm fond of jokes. Suppose we think it over?

MRS. WATERS I can think best when I'm alone. Good-bye.

[BENNY looks through window. He does not see TRAVERS, who is standing behind the door R.C.

BENNY I—I couldn't leave you Mrs. Waters, all alone with—with it. So I've come back to see if I—— [TRAVERS comes from behind door R.C.] Ha! I

[He falls into the grave which is dug just outside the window. TRAVERS looks out of the window and pulls him to his feet.

TRAVERS Come out of my grave.

MRS. WATERS It's only—only—

[Moves fingers with hands raised in an endeavour to remember his name.

TRAVERS (taking her hand and staring BENNY as he stands at window, staring at them) Only the future landlord of the Beehive

CURTAIN

(Bunness for second curtain. TRAVERS goes to window and pulls down the blind shutting BENNY out. He then returns and embraces MRS. WATERS.

## EXERCISES

### ✓ THE RELUCTANT DRAGON *Harcourt Williams*

- 1 How far does this play upset traditional ideas about St George and the Dragon?
- 2 Who is the real hero of the play?
- 3 What do you consider to be the most humorous situation?
- 4 You're such a manager Comment on this description of the boy
- 5 Quote a few speeches which illustrate the unconventional nature of the dialogue
- 6 *The Reluctant Dragon* contains seven scenes. Does this fact seriously add to the difficulties of the producer?
- 7 What are your impressions of the boy's father and mother?

### THE BLOATERS *Ella Atkins*

- 1 Make a brief synopsis of the plot of this play
- 2 Criticize the dialogue quoting any humorous lines that appeal to you
- 3 Which are the most important characters, and why?
- 4 Where does the climax occur in this play? Is it effectively worked up?
- 5 If you were producing *The Bloaters* what details would you single out for special attention?
- 6 When Mrs Brown sits on the settee holding the lorgnette "the effect is most incongruous" How far does the humour of the play depend on incongruity?
- 7 Explain why this piece may be suitably described as a domestic comedy

### HIGGINS *Ronald Gore*

- 1 To what extent has the author succeeded in giving Higgins "his fair share of literary whitewash" in this play?
- 2 "The songs may, of course, be left out, but they certainly help the show along Do you agree?

## 116 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

- 1 Higgins addresses Faekiel as "faithful friend." Prove from the action of the play that his estimate is true
- 2 Outline the part played by the boy
- 3 Illustrate the element of romance as it appears in this play
- 4 Criticize the ending, and add a possible sequel

### *The Cryer Forward* Neil Grant

- 1 Quote topical references to illustrate the fact that this is a recent play
- 2 How far does Pipeth's ignorance of football add to the dramatic interest?
- 3 What events important to this play have occurred before the curtain rises?
- 4 Criticize the characters and select for special comment the two you consider most interesting
- 5 Why must the producer pay serious attention to securing the necessary off-stage effects?
- 6 How is the idea of hero-worship developed in this play?
- 7 Explain exactly how the situation is saved and a happy ending secured. Do you consider the *denouement* to be convincing or otherwise?

### *The Wanderer* : Aubrey Fennard

- 1 This was written as a costume play for four girls. State precisely what you understand by a costume play and discuss the suitability of this piece for acting by female characters
- 2 How far does the diction suggest the period (seventeenth century)?
- 3 Who is the Wanderer? Make explicit the various historical references
- 4 What are your impressions of the heroine?
- 5 "Rosemary for remembrance." Explain the dramatic importance of the rosemary in this play, and suggest a further chapter in its history
- 6 "Heaven bless your wits." What is the significance of this remark? Compare this play with any other you know in which the conflict is one of wits.

### *The Golden Mean* A. E. M. Baylin and J. C. Baylin

- 1 What do you understand by the expression "The Golden Mean"? How is the idea developed in the play?

- 2 Make a list of the topical references. Which of them do you consider to be satirical?
- 3 Divide the characters into two groups showing how one group acts as a foil to the other.
- 4 Which of the properties in this play have the most dramatic significance?
- 5 ~~Georgio~~ Georgio calls himself "the fool of the family" Prove that he is too modest in his estimate of himself.
- 6 Discuss the suitability or otherwise of this play for broadcasting.

**THE SECOND BEST BED** *Cyril Roberts*

- 1 What qualities does this play possess that make for successful comedy?
- 2 How does the author suggest an appropriate atmosphere?
- 3 ~~What~~ What are the most noticeable traits in the characters of Anne Shakespeare? Illustrate your answer by suitable quotations.
- 4 Explain the importance of the will mentioned in this play.
- 5 Give briefly your impressions of Judith Quiney.
- 6 How does the introduction of the two visitors contribute to the dramatic effect?
- 7 What is the irony of the final situation?

**THE STRANGER** *L. du Garde Peach*

- 1 The author claims that this play may be acted without a stage, scenery, memorizing, or rehearsing. Explain how this is possible.
- 2 Comment on the dialogue.
- 3 How is the fact that the action takes place on Christmas Eve emphasized in this play?
- 4 Quote any remarks of the Stranger's that show special dramatic significance.
- 5 As set down by the author, the stage directions given are applicable only for broadcasting. Enlarge them for stage performance.
- 6 Sum up the essential differences in character between Delta and Harry.

**THE APPLE TREE** *Harold Brighouse*

- 1 This play is unlike any other in the book. Explain briefly its chief peculiarities.

## 116 JUNIOR ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY

- 1 Why are the stage directions at the beginning especially important?
- 2 Which characters most arouse (a) your sympathy and (b) your antipathy?
- 3 How is a 'medieval flavour' secured in this play?
- 4 Tell the story in your own words so as to bring out the meaning of the alternative title "Why Miser Never Dies"
- 5 Quote three of Death's most significant speeches

### *Outer Street* John Donald Kelly

- 1 What do you consider to be the most 'awkward moments' in this play? How are they brought about?
- 2 Account for the title *Outer Street*
- 3 Give effective specimens of irony in Mr Hart's speeches
- 4 How far does the dramatic effect of this play depend on the element of surprise?
- 5 The cloud is I doth a doing' Elaborate this statement
- 6 Where does the humour of the play chiefly lie in the situation or in the characterisation?

### *The Boatman's Mats* H. H. Jacobs and Herbert G. Sargent

- 1 Draw a plan of the stage and make a list of properties necessary for producing this play
- 2 Summarize the plot in your own words
- 3 Quote a few examples to illustrate the author's command of humorous dialogue
- 4 "What awful unpuddence the man has! Support this estimate of Travers' character by suitable references
- 5 How far may the conflict in this comedy be described as one of wits?
- 6 Part of the action occurs off stage. Explain the means by which this action is made clear to the audience
- 7 What is the point of the second curtain? Could it be dispensed with?

### GENERAL

- 1 Which of the characters in these plays would you be likely to meet in everyday life? Which are purely fanciful?
- 2 Classify the stories according to whether they are up to date

or deal with a past age. How are you able to 'date' a play without being told beforehand?

- 3 Quote a few stage directions that you would find especially helpful in acting one of the parts contained in this book
- 4 Give examples of plays in which (a) legend, (b) history, and (c) topical reference provide an important element
- 5 Do any of the plots strike you as being especially clever? Write a brief synopsis of the one you like best
6. Illustrate from these plays how a character 'saves the situation'
- 7 Which climax do you consider most effective, and why?
- 8 Give examples of plays that could be acted (a) out of doors and (b) on a small stage
- 9 Which hero and which heroine in this volume do you admire most? Sketch briefly the character of each
- 10 Which of these plays would be (a) the easiest and (b) the most difficult to cast from members of your class in school? Explain why you think so. If you had to produce three of them for public performance during one evening which would you choose in order to secure the greatest variety and to give as many pupils as possible something to do? What tasks could be assigned to those who are not good at acting?